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COTTON: A COERCIVE COMMODITY

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Cotton: a coercive commodity

A historical-comparative research on forced labour in the cotton industries of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (1928 – 2019)



Picture 1.¹

¹ Edited version by Melvin de Vries, Original by N. F. Korotkova, and M. A. Voron, *The Girl Worker of Oriental Russia, Freedom for Women*, 1930, Duke University Repository, Durham.

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Abstract

This research aims to demonstrate the role which the Soviet Union has played in continued reliance on forced labour in the cotton cultivation sectors of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. My main research question is: *What role has the Soviet Union played in the development of the labour regime of cotton in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan between 1928 and 2019?* The research is subdivided into four sections. Firstly, I argue that five dimensions help us explain why this region was prone to forced labour. Secondly, I argue that collective farming in Central Asia was a form of forced labour that is rarely labelled as such. Thirdly, I argue that there are geographical, regulatory, and industrial reasons why forced labour was employed after independence from the Soviet Union. Lastly, we observe a divergence in both countries whereby Uzbekistan abolished policies that perpetuated forced labour, whilst Turkmenistan has failed to do so. This research argues that leadership change has caused this. Cotton quotas and the slow adoption of mechanised agricultural innovations have caused continued reliance on forced labour. This has also caused poor labour conditions to exist for cotton pickers, which we will compare via the historical-comparative method.

Foreword

I would like to take the possibility to thank some people that have been impactful or important during this period of academic writing. Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Viola Müller, for supervising and supporting me wherever it was possible or necessary. Secondly, my friends and fellow students; Noah Rook research journalist studying at Leiden University to help me procure certain contemporary sources, Ronald van Velzen student at the National Chengchi University in Taiwan, specialised in Asian history for advising me on the broader Asiatic narrative, and Melvin de Vries for helping with the cover page. Thirdly, Remco Raben and Maarten Prak, two professors at Utrecht University. They have helped me during this past year, becoming a better historian, and a more capable writer. Lastly, I would like to thank the librarians of Utrecht University and their support in making it possible to access the sources whenever I had to. In that regard, I would also like to thank the people running the International Labour Organisation for supplying me with the initial information that inspired me to write on the topic.

Introduction and historical context

During the reign of Joseph Stalin from the 1930s to the early 1950s, millions of individuals were forcibly moved to the Central Asiatic Soviet Republics to set up large cotton farming projects. It has been argued that no region in the world has depended as tremendously on cotton, as Central Asia, since the Confederate States of America.² Cotton, a commodity grown in the region for more than two thousand years, has played a crucial economic role since the introduction of large cotton-producing *kolkhozes* in the 1950s.³ A *kolkhoz* is a collective farm structure from the Soviet Union. The role, that cotton once played, has not changed in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Ever since the Russians conquered and colonised Central Asia from the north in the 1860s, had the central government promoted the cultivation of cotton crops.⁴ This makes a certain continuity evident since the governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan still utilise a state-led industry, to produce this cash crop. In addition to the state-led aspect, both countries have also made use of, and are continuing to utilise, forced labour. This is to fulfil cotton cultivation quotas, or the so-called procurement system, set by the government to boost exports.⁵ In the 1970s, roughly sixty per cent of the cotton production was used for the domestic needs of the Soviet Union, and the remaining one-third was exported. The US Department of Agriculture described the cultivation of Central Asian cotton in 1977, despite not mechanising it completely, as a “success story” of Soviet agriculture.⁶ Attempts to mechanise the cultivation of the cotton crop occurred. However, the process was slow and by the 1990s over fifty per cent of Uzbek cotton was still picked by hand. This number increased again after the fall of the Soviet Union. Some anecdotal evidence by historian Andrew Apostolou suggests that over ninety per cent of Uzbek cotton was handpicked.⁷ It paints a bleak picture of how the Central Asian cotton industry operated in the 1990s in general and the cotton pickers in particular. It also suggests a lack of capital investment by the independent republics after their independence.

² Deniz Kandiyoti, “Introduction,” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Iskandar Abdullaev, and John Baffes (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007), 12-13.

³ John Baffes, “Cotton-Dependent Countries in the Global Context,” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Iskandar Abdullaev, and John Baffes (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007), 44.

⁴ Richard Pomfret, “State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia,” *The Journal of Economic History* 62 (2002): 174.

⁵ Kandiyoti, “Introduction,” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 4-5.

⁶ Gregory Gleason, “Marketization and Migration: The Politics of Cotton in Central Asia,” *Journal of Soviet Nationalities* 1 (1990): 66.

⁷ Pomfret, “State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia,” 172-173.

Research question, sub-questions, and thesis structure

This Master's thesis explores the historical relationship between the Soviet-led implementation of large cotton plantations and the subsequent forced labour programmes to sustain this industry, which can be observed to this day. To gain a finer historical insight, the following main research question has been formulated: *What role has the Soviet Union played in the development of the labour regime of cotton in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan between 1928 and 2019?*

My main research question aims to find the relationship between the history of Soviet-implemented forced labour programmes and the continued use of it, within the production process, in the post-Soviet world. Thereby this study will contribute to the research on forced labour in post-Soviet countries. The time range between 1928 and 2019 is chosen since this research aims to demonstrate the historical legacy of the Soviet Union. Since the Soviet Union began to dictate how labour was organised in 1928, this year has been chosen as a clear cut-off point. My research ends in 2019 since the International Labour Organisation, or ILO, provides a well-documented report on that year's harvesting season. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are comparable since they share a relatively similar history under Soviet rule, are in the same climate zone, are the largest suppliers of cotton in Central Asia. Additionally, they are the only two republics that have chosen to retain their state-led cotton industries after independence in 1991.⁸ Though Turkmenistan initially lacked the fertility of the Fergana Valley, it compensates for it with access to the Karakum Canal and its water supply which makes both countries more comparable.

To answer the main research question, this research answers its sub-questions chronologically to have composition. Firstly, this thesis aims to dedicate only a fraction to defining forced labour. Dedicating only part of the sub-question will be sufficient since this paper aims to remain practical. My first sub-question is *What role did the Soviet Union play in the introduction of forced labour into the cotton sector?* By analysing the introduction of the Soviet labour regime, a finer comprehension of continuity becomes apparent when we come closer to the present day. My second sub-question is: *How did the labour conditions and farming methods change between 1953 and 1991 in the cotton sector of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic?* This question aims to capture the changes forced labour programmes went through during the post-Stalinist years of the Soviet Union, and how these changes affected cotton production or the other way around. The third

⁸ J. Otto Pohl, "A Caste of Helot Labourers: Special Settlers and the Cultivation of Cotton in Soviet Central Asia: 1944-1956," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Iskandar Abdullaev, and John Baffes (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007), 12.

sub-question continues upon these changes. Chapter 3 focuses on the years after independence and the continuation of their cotton-based state-led agricultural endeavours: *How did the use of forced labour in the cotton sector change after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan?* The second half of Chapter 3 focusses on: *What caused the sudden decline of forced labour in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, how does it break with the past and what effect does it have on cotton production?* will discuss the methods used to harvest cotton, the way forced labour has diverged in both countries recently and why these changes will not revert. By chronologically discussing the evolution of forced labour, the sudden divergence after independence can be viewed as a sudden break from the past. Thereby, I hypothesise that the divergence in labour regimes between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is caused by leadership change and breaks with a long history of labour coercion.

Historiography and academic relevance

The historiography of forced labour in Central Asia is not a particularly dense one. Most available sources were written in the late twentieth century with a clear focus on the political and technological approach. What it lacks is a combination of the two. Many historians, such as Steven Rosefielde, were addressing in the 1990s the determinates of economic growth, the political economy of Stalinism, and limited economic achievements through a Western perspective.⁹ In 1990 Gregory Gleason argued that the use of forced labour is partially the result of Soviet policies to employ a large portion of the population because of the availability and accessibility of cheap labour in combination with the continued expansion of irrigated land.¹⁰ He laid the groundwork for future historians on Central Asian forced labour studies. On the introduction of institutionalised slavery in the Americas, one of the grand theories has been that forced labour is implemented when labour is scarce, and land is plentiful. This thesis demonstrates that we do not fully understand why and under what circumstances forced labour emerges. In 1994, Nathan J. Brown wrote on labour regimes, as seen in Egypt, and how they are defined as a form of corvée system, which rests upon an autocratic state that forces cultivation and harvesting of cotton on a temporary but regular basis, while not paying or underpaying workers.¹¹ This is identical to the state-organised forced labour regimes of

⁹ Steven Rosefielde "Stalinism in Post-Communist Perspective: New Evidence on Killings, Forced Labour and Economic Growth in the 1930s," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48 (1996): 959-960.

¹⁰ Gleason, "Marketization and Migration: The Politics of Cotton in Central Asia," 83.

¹¹ Nathan J. Brown, "Who Abolished Corvee Labour in Egypt and Why?" *Past & Present* 144 (1994): 116-137.

Central Asia according to McGuire and Laaser.¹² Most historians who write on forced labour in cotton cultivation leave out the economic implications of forced labour, for example, limited mechanisation. Richard Pomfret focused on mechanisation when he argued that low labour costs stood in the way of adequate mechanisation of Central Asian cotton cultivation.¹³ However, he failed to adequately mention forced labour as the defining feature, when he mentions merely the abundance of cheap labour. Darren McGuire and Knut Laaser argue in their 2018 article that labour management practices are both enabling and sustaining the labour exploitation system in the Uzbek cotton industry.¹⁴ They draw heavily from Andrew Crane's theory on slavery as a management practice. By writing a historical analysis that spans from 1928 to the near present of 2019, this study will contribute to the historical debate by filling a knowledge gap on contemporary and historical forced labour in the cotton industry using Crane's slavery as a management practice theory, and Marcel van der Linden's three moments of coercion. This will make it manageable to discover how the legacy of forced labour could carry over from the Soviet Union to the current day Central Asian republics. What these theories entail will be discussed below. This innovative approach will facilitate a new point of view in the explanation of contemporary forced labour from which future scholars can draw.

Primary sources, methods, and theories

This thesis aims to employ several aspects of Crane's slavery as a management practice theory. It combines different layers of the political economy with institutional theory and an actor-focused capacity approach whereby several independent contextual factors play a role in the consistent existence of slavery. These are the industry, socio-economic, geographic, cultural, and regulatory context. These contextual factors explain how institutions are enabled to continually use forced labour. It allows us to directly analyse the reasons for the existence of forced labour programmes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁵ This theory combines adequately with the historical-comparative method, since it provides ample possibilities to compare different contextual factors. It will be utilised in Chapter 1 and 3. Additionally, I will employ *the three moments of coercion* by Van der Linden to analyse the three moments of

¹² Darren McGuire, and Knut Laaser, "'You have to pick': Cotton and state-organized forced labour in Uzbekistan," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* (2018): 2.

¹³ Pomfret, "State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia," 185.

¹⁴ McGuire, and Laaser, "'You have to pick': Cotton and state-organized forced labour in Uzbekistan," 16.

¹⁵ Andrew Crane, "Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation," *The Academy of Management Review* 38 (2013): 49-69.

coerced labour: (1) *The entry*: under which conditions do workers enter a particular labour relationship? (2) *Extraction*: the way an employer extracts labour from a labourer, under which conditions does this happen. (3) *Exit*: In which capacity, and how, are workers able to terminate their labour relationship.¹⁶ In the second half of Chapter 3, I will examine the years of independence in Central Asia, where we use Matthew Lange's take on the *path dependency theory*.¹⁷ This theory will be discussed in the second half of Chapter 3. Throughout the entire thesis, both countries will be compared via the historical-comparative method. This research utilises the definition of forced labour as forced work under threat, ownership, or control through abuse, constraints on freedom of movement, and economic exploitation through underpayment. This definition follows Crane's definition of modern slavery.¹⁸ However, it negates the commodification and dehumanisation aspects since I find these features more defining for slavery, as opposed to forced labour.

It is important to analyse the economic dimension of cotton production in Central Asia. This will be accomplished by examining cotton production figures, and the percentage of the population that participates in forced labour. The dominant primary source on which I rely is written and compiled by the ILO and is called *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan*.¹⁹ This primary source, which consists of third-party monitoring of labour conditions during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan, provides an insight into the contemporary conditions of forced labour and child-labour practises. It goes into detail on how the government makes efforts to improve labour conditions and how these conditions have improved compared to previous years. In addition to discussing labour conditions, it quantifies forced labour figures and cotton harvest data. This source is valuable since it compiles findings by the ILO on labour conditions for agricultural workers in cotton fields, where they were allowed to independently monitor. It contains innumerable and valuable figures and accounts by an independent organisation. However, the source is weakened by its geographical scope. The report limits itself to Uzbekistan and there does not appear to exist a similar report on Turkmenistan. Besides the geographical limitation, it also only accounts for a limited time window. The ILO only started monitoring labour conditions in Uzbekistan from 2013 onwards, which initially was rather limited in scope. This has been expanded since 2015. This source will principally be used to

¹⁶ Marcel van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labour," in *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, ed. M. vd Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 293-322.

¹⁷ Matthew Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods* (London: Sage, 2013), 85.

¹⁸ Crane, "Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation," 53.

¹⁹ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020).

answer what role forced labour has played after the independence of Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic produced two-thirds of cotton in the Soviet Union. This has resulted in a broader availability of primary and secondary sources compared to Turkmenistan.²⁰ To compensate for this partial imbalance, more newspaper articles will be used so that the contemporary aspects of forced labour are analysed on a similar level. Newspaper articles could shine a light on the foreign view of forced labour in the cotton cultivation industry. Foreign opinions can limit export capabilities through foreign pressure. State speeches and laws that have been proclaimed during this period, help us identify official state policy on forced labour. This research is limited in its scope due to its dependence on translations of Russian, Uzbek, and Turkmen sources, in addition to English and Dutch literature.

Cotton production figures have been compiled from multiple sources. From the period 1913 to 1988, the figures are from Gregory Gleason. He has compiled a table with production figures in thousands of tonnes of raw cotton multiple sources by the central government in Moscow.²¹ The data from after 1988 has been added from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.²² These production figures will be used to pinpoint the growth or shrinkage of cotton-producing capabilities and determine which role forced labour played at these moments in history.

²⁰ Kandiyoti, "Introduction," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 1.

²¹ Gleason, "Marketization and Migration: The Politics of Cotton in Central Asia," 67.

²² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Top 20 Countries Production of Seed cotton," Food and Agricultural Organization, 1992-2017, http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#rankings/countries_by_commodity.

Chapter 1: The introduction of Soviet-forced labour

To gain a detailed comprehension of the role that the Soviet Union has played during 1953 and 1991, it is vital to establish the status of forced labour in the cotton sector of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic. By posing the sub-question: *What role did the Soviet Union play in the introduction of forced labour into the cotton sector?* we can analyse the introduction of forced labour in the Soviet Union. Before analysing the introduction of forced labour, we will have to establish how Central Asia came into the Russian sphere of influence. This historical context is vital because the subdivision of the region had profound effects on its future. Furthermore, we will establish a definition of forced labour. To compare both republics we must take into consideration Crane's theory which considers the five contexts: industry, socio-economic, geographic, cultural, and regulatory context to determine if the conditions suitable for this form of labour.

Formation of the republics

Central Asia managed to stay nominally independent until 1868 because of its geographic barriers and relative isolation. This year marked the invasion of the Emirate of Bukhara by the Russian Empire. Large swaths of territory were annexed after its defeat, including the city of Samarkand. Afterwards, the Khanates of Khiva- and Kokand became protectorates in 1873 and 1876, respectively. In 1920, both protectorates and the remnants of the Emirate of Bukhara merged into the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. This autonomous republic was divided and carved up subsequently in 1924 into the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic and Bukharan People's Soviet Republic and lay at the foundation of both the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic as well the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic. The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was established on the 27th of October 1924 as a constituent republic of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.²³ The subsequent subdivision of the Central Asian region is called the *national delimitation*, which means a regional division into ethnically based republics. The new regional subdivision gave Uzbekistan the lion's share of the highly fertile Fergana Valley. A valley that would later prove to be a valuable agricultural asset to whoever owned it. As a result of the merger of the Transcaspian Region and the Turkmen Oblast of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Turkmen Soviet Socialist

²³ Although the official name of the republic is the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, I will refer to the region as Uzbekistan. This decision is fuelled by a desire to avoid confusion because the borders of the territory hardly change after 1929, with the secession of Tajikistan.

Republic was born.²⁴ The borders drawn for the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic correspond approximately to that of today's Turkmenistan.



Picture 2. Map of the division of Central Asia during the Tsarist Russian era.²⁵

Cotton production between 1913 and 1953

Central Asia was not always known for its cotton production. Though it used to facilitate cotton trade between India and Persia in the Indo-Central Asian textile trade. Additionally, it held the role of a modest cotton production exporter to Russia. However, it was not yet the powerhouse it would become in the late 19th and 20th century.²⁶ This is caused by a combination of poor climate conditions that required extensive irrigation, and the demand for most agricultural land to be devoted to the growth of foodstuffs. This resulted in a great dependency on India for the import of cotton and cotton textiles.²⁷ Although cotton had been produced in Central Asia for at least two millennia, wide-scale cotton production only began

²⁴ Although officially named the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, I will refer to the region as Turkmenistan. I have decided to avoid confusion and because the borders have hardly changed after the merger of the Transcaspien Region and the Turkmen Oblast of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

²⁵ Picture from: Cartographer unknown, "Russische Eroberungen in Zentral-Asien." 1:18.000.000. In Meyers grosses Konversations-Lexikon, Leipzig: Meyers Konversations-Lexikon, 1908, from "Russisch-Zentralasien," <http://www.zeno.org/Meyers-1905/L/Wm17330a>.

²⁶ Scott Levi, "India, Russia and the Eighteenth-Century Transformation of the Central Asian Caravan Trade," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (1999): 532.

²⁷ Levi, "India, Russia and the Eighteenth-Century Transformation of the Central Asian Caravan Trade," 530-531.

in the 19th century with introduction of the American variety.^{28 29} Before the collectivisation process of the Turkmen cotton industry, agricultural output was at 69.000 tonnes of cotton, which can be observed in figure 1.³⁰ This process of collectivisation was a period in the Soviet Union, between 1928 and 1940, in which the agricultural sector was reorganised into state-directed collective farms. These collective farms were run as joint enterprises by a multiplicity of farmers, who had previously held their private farms. By 1940, this number had risen to 211.000 tonnes and by 1953 it had reached 308.000 tonnes. When these figures are compared with those of Uzbekistan, it is apparent that Uzbek figures were inherently higher. In 1913, a total of 517.000 tonnes of cotton was harvested. As visible in figure 1, this number had risen to 1.386.000 tonnes in 1940. In 1953 the cotton production figures grew further to 2.432.000 tonnes. Thus, we can establish that the agricultural cotton output in Uzbekistan was inherently higher than that of Turkmenistan throughout the period of 1913 and 1953.

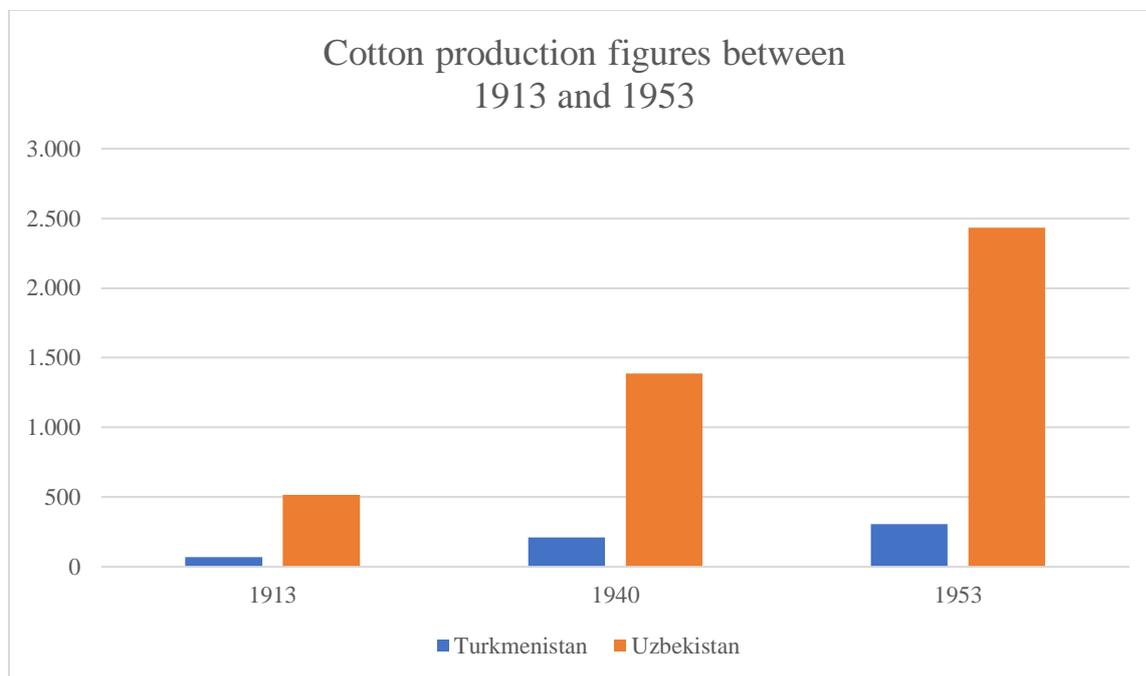


Figure 1. Cotton production figures in thousands of tonnes of raw cotton between 1913 and 1953.³¹

²⁸ Levi, "India, Russia and the Eighteenth-Century Transformation of the Central Asian Caravan Trade," 531.

²⁹ Bilal A. Bhat, "Forced Labor of Children in Uzbekistan's Cotton Industry," *International Journal on World Peace* 30 (2013): 63.

³⁰ Figures compiled from *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1958 godu* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe statisticheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1959), 369-382, and 419. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1961 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1962), 357. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1962 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1963), 281. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1967 godu* (Moscow: Statistika, 1968), 385. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1972 godu* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Statistika, 1973), 333. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1975 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1976), 367. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1979 godu* (Moscow: Statistika, 1980), 250. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 godu* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1986), 210. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1988 godu* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1989), 455. Entries are from tables identified as "Valovoi sbor (zakupki) khlopka-syrtsa po soiuzytnym respublikam."

³¹ Gleason, "Marketization and Migration: The Politics of Cotton in Central Asia," 67.

Soviet implementation of forced labour during the Stalinist-era

Slavery had been present in the Uzbek territories of Khiva and Bukhara as well the Turkmen territories before the Russian annexation of the region. British and Russian observers had reported in the mid-nineteenth century on approximately ten thousand Persian slaves in Khiva and over a hundred thousand slaves in the Khivan, Bukharan, and Turkmen territories.³² These would fall under *chattel slavery*. Chattel slavery is defined as a form of slavery that features a person in question, who can be legally owned, bought, and sold. The status is indefinite, the transfers from generation to generation, with the main goal of producing commercial goods.³³ This was banned by the League of Nations Slavery Convention of 1926.³⁴ Consequently, I intend to focus on the forced labour introduced by the Soviet Union, because it serves as both continuity and discontinuity.³⁵ It serves as a continuity because forms of forced labour had existed in the region. Moreover, it illustrates discontinuity because the Soviet Union imposed it on a national level.

In July 1929, the Communist party had proclaimed the need for the Soviet Union to become independent from the world cotton market. It had to become fully self-sufficient in its domestic production of cotton, which could only be made possible by forcing the maximum production of cotton. The initial goal of 590.000 tonnes of cotton was raised to nearly 800.000 tonnes for the harvest of 1932.³⁶ This indicates the first *cotton quota* that I could find. However, Central Asia was lacking in two aspects to make this possible: water and labour. Partially, this was to be mitigated by the expansion of the irrigation system, which had been a bottleneck during the times of the Russian Empire. The labour shortage, however, had to be resolved differently.

The employment of forced labour during this era was characterised by collectivisation and the employment of foreign deportees as forced labourers.³⁷ These deportees originated from other parts of the Soviet Union and were a by-product of the Bolshevik's national delimitation process. This was called the *special settlement regime*. Stalin's regime deported tens of thousands of prisoners to the cotton plantations of labour camps. Under harsh

³² Alessandro Stanziani, *Slavery and Bondage in Central Asia and Russia from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Berghahn Books: New York and London, 2014), 79.

³³ Pepijn Brandon, Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe and Matthias van Rossum, *Slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam Onderzoek* (Spectrum: Amsterdam, 2020), 23.

³⁴ League of Nations, Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery, 25 September 1926, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36fb.html>, [accessed 11 April 2021].

³⁵ Stanziani, *Slavery and Bondage in Central Asia and Russia from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century*, 79.

³⁶ Maya K. Peterson, "US to USSR: American Experts, Irrigation, and Cotton in Soviet Central Asia, 1929-32," *Environmental History* 21 (2016): 448.

³⁷ Pohl, "A Caste of Helot Labourers: Special Settlers and the Cultivation of Cotton in Soviet Central Asia: 1944-1956," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 26.

conditions, they were forced to pick cotton plants. The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD, had ordered the deportation of multiple people groups to faraway homelands. These were the Russian Germans, Karachays, Balkars, Chechens, Kalmyks, Ingush, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks.³⁸ The last two would mainly be sent to Uzbekistan. In 1944, during the Second World War, over 150,000 Crimean Tatars were deported to Uzbekistan. The Uzbek authorities envisioned the employment of these forced labourers in the Uzbek agricultural sector. Though scaled back later, thousands of Crimean Tatars ended up as forced labourers working in the Uzbek cotton fields of the *sovkhozes*. The *sovkhozes* vary slightly from *kolkhozes* since workers on a *sovkhoz* were paid a wage, whereas workers on a *kolkhoz* were distributed a portion of the farm's earnings. Later the Soviet government resettled a sizeable population of Meskhetian Turks from the Caucasian region to Uzbekistan. Their numbers, in the tens of thousands, boosted Uzbek cotton production in the 1940s.³⁹ Though not exclusively deported to Uzbekistan, in these years Tajikistan and Kazakhstan were also sizeable destinations for deportees. However, the majority of these two people groups ended up in Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan was notably absent from the list. After the Second World War, Uzbekistan enjoyed a boom in cotton production as well as population growth. Uzbekistan industrialised during this period, but it did not mechanise. Although this lack of mechanisation meant an inefficient way of farming, it did contribute to full employment, which the republic aimed at.⁴⁰ Akmal Ikramov was First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan from 1929 to 1937. He took the lead in collectivising the agricultural sector of Uzbekistan and followed the line set by Joseph Stalin by prioritising cotton over other crops. Another notable political figure during this period was his successor, Usman Yusupov, by being the only dedicated Minister of Cotton Growing of the Soviet Union from 1950 to 1953.

There was also a push towards forced labour in Turkmenistan. The Tsarist government had introduced large-scale cotton cultivation in the region. According to a population census from the Russian government in 1897, close to two-thirds of the Turkmens in the Transcaspian province had picked up agriculture. Many of them started cultivating cotton.⁴¹ What was then called: the Transcaspian province, would later turn into Turkmenistan. Lenin declared, in November 1920, the reconstruction of both the Uzbek and Turkmen cotton

³⁸ Pohl, "A Caste of Helot Labourers: Special Settlers and the Cultivation of Cotton in Soviet Central Asia: 1944-1956," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 22-23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 24.

⁴⁰ Jenny Leigh Smith, "Agricultural Involution in the Postwar Soviet Union," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 85 (2014): 69.

⁴¹ Adrienne L. Edgar, "Genealogy, Class, and "Tribal Policy" in Soviet Turkmenistan, 1924-1934," *Slavic Review* 2 (2001): 272.

industries. They were to be the primary cotton-growing regions of the Soviet Union.⁴² During the initial three five-year plans, the implementation of cotton in the Central Asian republics played a key role in their integration into the Soviet Union. Its aim in Turkmenistan was the eradication of traditional economic and landholding patterns. As a result, the link between genealogy and economic interest would be broken. This eradication made it possible to open the countryside up to class struggle and Soviet influence.⁴³ In Turkmenistan, there had previously existed two systems of agriculture. The system of *mülk*, which was a form of privately held land, and *sanashik*, a system that aimed at co-ownership of the land. By breaking up these systems, the Soviet authorities did not strive to redistribute the land more equally. These land reforms were principally aimed at breaking the lineage with the past and herald the territory to Soviet influence. These land reforms, which passed through the decrees of the central or provincial governments, were unpopular. The land was confiscated from merchants, clergy, and nomads.⁴⁴ High-value cash crops, such as fruits, had to make way for the “white gold” cotton monoculture. After the land reforms of the 1920s and the introduction of kolkhozes and sovkhozes in the 1930s, cotton production surged.⁴⁵ As seen in figure 1, Turkmen cotton production grew steadily but would skyrocket in the future with the completion of the Karakum Canal.⁴⁶ According to the Soviet Central Government, mass cotton agricultural output would be at its most efficient when the required irrigation canals were dug for kolkhozes. After 1928, it was not simply encouraged, but required to plant cotton on Turkmen farms.⁴⁷ This forced collectivisation led to civil unrest, a wave of emigration to neighbouring republics and countries, and food scarcity.⁴⁸ Collectivisation and forced labour in the Turkmen cotton fields were, in combination with the shifting role of the woman, regarded as reasons to speak out and resist Soviet rule. Although the Soviet Union had propagated the release of the shekels for the Tsarist *cotton colonies* the legacy of the cotton colonies continued.⁴⁹ Although, collectivising was, in theory, a voluntary decision, in practice the government and its local branches forced or coerced farmers to sign up.

According to a government representative of the Chärjew province: “If you do not sign up for

⁴² Sarah L. O'Hara, and Tim Hannan, “Irrigation and Water Management in Turkmenistan: Past Systems, Present Problems and Future Scenarios,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 1 (1999): 25.

⁴³ Edgar, “Genealogy, Class, and “Tribal Policy” in Soviet Turkmenistan, 1924-1934,” 275.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 275.

⁴⁵ Max Spoor, “Cotton in Central Asia: “Curse” or “Foundation for Development”?” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Iskandar Abdullaev, and John Baffes (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007), 56.

⁴⁶ Spoor, “Cotton in Central Asia: “Curse” or “Foundation for Development”?” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 57.

⁴⁷ Adrienne L. Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2004), 207-208.

⁴⁸ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, 209.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 207.

the kolkhoz, they'll force you to plant cotton. They won't allow you to plant even one pound of grain, and you'll die of hunger." In the Ashgabat region, peasants were coerced to join the kolkhoz under threat of losing their land, water allotments from newly dug canals, and a ban on cooking oil and train tickets.⁵⁰ Occasionally, their voting rights were threatened to be revoked.⁵¹ Thus, we can establish that it was not merely a voluntary procedure.

Crane's five contexts

In this chapter, I argue that Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan possessed certain characteristics which made it more likely for forced labour to occur. This will be argued via the layered dimensions of Crane's 'Modern Slavery as a Management Practice'. These are the industry, socio-economic, geographic, context, and regulatory context. These contextual factors will provide us with indications why this region was prone to forced labour.⁵²

The industry context stipulates certain industries to be more often prone to forced labour.⁵³ The socio-economic context is vital to the supply of forced labour. Certain factors such as the gross-domestic product and unemployment make forced labour more likely to exist.⁵⁴ Geographically, the more isolated and hidden regions are more prone to forced labour. They perpetuate the institutionalisation and normalisation of forced labour, which can be attributed to physical distance from the labourer's home country. Other factors, such as the availability of large, irrigated lands, can influence the presence of forced labour.⁵⁵ In the cultural context, informal institutional rules perpetuated by cultural norms accommodate forms of forced labour. These could be traditions, entrenched inequalities, or religious beliefs.⁵⁶ Lastly, the regulatory context operates through laws and agreements. These can determine the presence or absence of forced labour, which in combination with the strength of the authorities, can contribute to the normalisation of forced labour.⁵⁷

Comparing the introduction of forced labour in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, it is striking that Uzbekistan relied more upon foreign deportees. Comparatively, the Uzbek cotton sector was larger than that of Turkmenistan. The geography of both republics partially explains this. Before the completion of the Karakum Canal, Turkmenistan's main concern

⁵⁰ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, 204.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 207.

⁵² Crane, "Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation," 53.

⁵³ *Ibid.*: 55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 55.

⁵⁵ Crane, "Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation," 56.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 57.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 57-58.

was not labour but water. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan enjoyed the flow of the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya for its irrigational needs. However, it lacked the labourers necessary for the two to three months of the cotton harvest season. Uzbekistan had the advantage of a warm climate and a long growing season over other republics. In the Soviet period, these conditions ensured high and reliable crop yields.⁵⁸ It became apparent in the first decades of the Soviet Union, after the failed mechanisation of the agricultural sector, that Uzbekistan was reliant on manual labour. The growing scope of the cotton sector meant that during harvest, the collectivised farmers had insufficient manual labour to bring in the harvest. This meant labour from outside was necessary. Additionally, escaping the region is difficult because of its geographic features, such as its vastness and isolation.

The industry context stipulates that some industries are more prone to forced labour than others. These are in agriculture, mining and extraction, and some manufacturing jobs. Sectors such as agriculture experience low technological development, while demand for unskilled labour is high.⁵⁹ Agriculture is a labour-intensive industry, certainly during the harvest season. The cotton sector of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is thus prone to forced labour because of its labour-intensiveness and high demand for unskilled labourers. This demand could be mitigated by mechanisation. However, we observe a slow adoption of mechanised farming. Though, experimented with American harvesting machines in the 1930s, the main mechanisation process of the cotton harvest only started in 1949, with the introduction of the first domestically mass-produced cotton harvester; the SkhM-48.⁶⁰ With a lack of domestically produced machines, the Soviet Union could either rely upon imported machinery from abroad or hand-pickers to fulfil the required labour. They chose the latter. The production of the SkhM-48 was halted due to political infighting after five years.⁶¹ In a capitalist market-based economy, technical competition would determine the way forward. However, in the centrally planned Soviet economy, bureaucrats without technical knowledge decided farming strategies. Khrushchev disrupted the production of cotton machinery in favour of tractors and grain harvesters. When subsequent cotton-quotas were not met due to a lack of mechanisation initiated by himself, he laid the blame with the political leaders of the Central Asian republics and purged them between 1958 and 1961.⁶² The mere presence of the centrally planned Soviet economy, which caused the subsequent lack of mechanisation, is a

⁵⁸ Bhat, "Forced Labor of Children in Uzbekistan's Cotton Industry," 65.

⁵⁹ Crane, "Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation," 53-54.

⁶⁰ Pomfret, "State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia," 174.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 176.

⁶² Pomfret, "State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia," 176.

factor that contributed to the reliance on forced labour.

Cultural differences also existed between the regions. According to Olivier Roy, a French political scientist, the Uzbek emirates of Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva had a traditional Islamic and sedentary culture. Turkmenistan was more influenced by nomadic cultures.⁶³ According to Roy, this separates the three distinct regions of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan remained tribalistic and nomadic. Uzbeks settled for a more sedentary life.⁶⁴ Agriculture was present in the western region of what would later be called the Transcaspian province. However, the culture that persisted in Turkmenistan was both more nomadic, as well as tribalistic. This cultural difference manifests itself through the eradication of Turkmenistan's culture on communal land use. Cotton cultivation existed before collectivisation, as did forced labour. However, employing the peasant population in cotton and subjecting them to food dependency was new. Importing food from other republics was breaking with the past. The way that females and children were coerced into working in the cotton fields was new for the deeply religious and traditional society.⁶⁵ This is notable because women and children would constitute most cotton pickers in the future.

Additionally, the socio-economic context played a role. The economies of Central Asia were largely focused on the domestic market. The rurality of both republics and lower levels of GDP per capita will, with all else being equal, equate to more slavery.⁶⁶ Before the Second World War, the Soviet Union did not reach a GDP above 2,500 US dollars.⁶⁷ Though the country was not incredibly poor, inequality between the urbanised Western Soviet Union and the Central Asian region, in combination with a decline in the annual per capita growth rate of the Central Asian republics, shows that Central Asia was indeed a poorer region.⁶⁸ Unemployment accentuates the push towards forced labour, as recruiters are more easily able to recruit. During the collectivisation, farmers were coerced to join kolkhozes and sovkhoses since their private farms could not compete with state-led farms and their unsustainable state-set prices.⁶⁹ It drove peasants into poverty and unemployment.

Lastly, formal institutional elements influence labour coercion. Since the forced labour regimes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are a form of state-imposed forced labour. The

⁶³ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 17.

⁶⁴ Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nations*, 17.

⁶⁵ Nancy Lubin, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions," *Soviet Studies* 33 (1981): 182.

⁶⁶ Crane, "Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation," 55.

⁶⁷ Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: Paris, 2006), 185.

⁶⁸ Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, 156.

⁶⁹ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, 207.

special settlers had been codified via two decrees which were called: “On the Legal Status of Special Settlers,” in 1945. In it, their restrictions and social status were defined.⁷⁰ The regulatory context also relates to the strength of the government. Where normally, in Crane’s theory, a strong government could prevent forced labour and modern slavery, in this case, it makes it more possible. It is notable that the formal institution of the state has embedded this variation of labour in its laws.⁷¹ The declarations by Lenin are examples of how state direction steered Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan towards a workforce comprised of forced labourers. The sheer importance of cotton was even embedded into the emblems of both republics. [See Picture 3 and 4 below]



Picture 3. The emblem of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic 1938 - 1992.⁷²

⁷⁰ Pohl, “A Caste of Helot Labourers: Special Settlers and the Cultivation of Cotton in Soviet Central Asia: 1944-1956,” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 18.

⁷¹ Crane, “Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation,” 57-58.

⁷² Picture from: http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Emblem_of_the_Turkmen_Soviet_Socialist_Republic.



Picture 4. The emblem of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic 1947 - 1978.⁷³

Conclusion

Examining the founding years of both republics and the introduction of forced labour by the Soviet Union helps us understand its longevity and connection with the present. By erasing traditional forms of agriculture, a lineage was broken. Labour and water were in demand during this period. From 1913 to 1953, we noticed a steady increase in cotton procurement. Collectivisation was important during this period. It is a process in which peasants are forced to join kolkhozes to make the vast expansion of cotton fields possible. In Uzbekistan, an influx of deportees from different parts of the Soviet Union existed due to the national delimitation process. In combination with collectivised farming, this constitutes the first wave of cotton pickers. The Soviet Union was more concerned with the eradication of the tribalistic and nomadic cultures of Turkmenistan. It was a result of the different cultural and geographic contexts, which differentiated the republics. The socio-economic, regulatory, and industry contexts held similarities. The inefficacy of the centrally planned Soviet economy, a lack of technological innovations, and top-down management contributed to the reliance on manual labour. People were prone to this form of labour due to poverty and unemployment. Employment enforcement could be realised with the presence of a strong government. Additionally, written laws and decrees on cotton quotas and labour regimes codified forced labour into national law.

Crane explicitly includes forced labour in his definition of modern slavery. However, I

⁷³ Picture from: Amos Chapple, "Status Symbol: National Emblems Of The Former Soviet Union, Then And Now," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 17, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ussr-ex-soviet-state-symbols-national-emblems-gallery/31043705.html>.

do not agree with this. According to Crane, modern slavery is characterised by forced work under threat, ownership, or control through abuse, dehumanisation, and commodification, constraints on freedom of movement, and economic exploitation through underpayment.⁷⁴ This research holds back on labelling cotton harvesting and collective farming as forms of modern slavery, even when Crane mentions the Uzbek cotton sector as a form of modern slavery. Although pickers worked under harsh conditions, they lacked the commodification and dehumanising aspects necessary to call it modern slavery. Additionally, I find the socio-economic aspect on his theory rather weak. When examining cases, after the 1926 League of Nations Slavery Convention, that deal with modern slavery, it is hard to determine the importance of a low gross-domestic-product. Employing a Gini coefficient of income inequality would be a more valuable indicator.

⁷⁴ Crane, “Modern Slavery as a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation,” 53.

Chapter 2: The period of continuation

Previously, we established the introduction of forced labour. Chapter 2 focuses on its evolution. The evolution will be examined by discussing cotton production numbers, looking at collective farms, mechanisation, and identifying the composition and conditions in the cotton fields. This chapter will employ Van der Linden's theory on the moments of coercion, to identify whether collectivised farming is a form of forced labour. It is essential to divide labour on cotton farms between collectivised farming, which happened year-round, and the cotton harvest, which usually lasted only two to three months. The harvest required mobilisation of more workers than the collectivised farms could supply. This chapter will employ the sub-question: *How did the labour conditions and farming methods change between 1953 and 1991 in the cotton sector of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic?*

The historical context of the period

The Soviet government gradually dismantled its special settlement regime from 1954 to 1956 as part of the de-Stalinisation process. This labour programme made the resettlement of minorities from different parts of the Soviet Union possible. The special settlement regime, which I would classify as the first wave of forced labour in Uzbekistan, existed in addition to collective farming. The dismantlement of the special settlement regime marked the end of the first wave of forced labour. With the ever-growing hunger for cotton in the Soviet Union, the expansion of irrigated lands, and the dismantled of the special settlement regimes, a new source of labour had to be found. It opened the door for the second wave of forced labour. The second wave entailed the mobilisation of women and children. These self-declared waves are marked by changes in policy and the pool from which labour recruitment targets. After the Stalinist era of Ikramov and Yusupov, Sharaf Rashidov, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan between 1959 and 1983, emerged as the key figure in expanding the cotton industry for the republic. His central role within the Uzbek government, which spanned a lengthy period, is notable since he is a well-known and controversial figure for falsifying the cotton production numbers in the late 1970s- and 80s. It is called the Great Cotton Scandal of the late Brezhnev period.⁷⁵ Rashidov was vocally never against mechanisation. However, he did not act in such a manner.⁷⁶ Slow efforts towards mechanisation were commonplace during

⁷⁵ Derek Edward Peterson, "When a Pound Weighed a Ton: The Cotton Scandal and Uzbek National Consciousness," Master's Thesis, (Ohio State University, 2013), 29-30.

⁷⁶ Gregory Gleason, "Sharaf Rashidov and the Dilemmas of National Leadership," *Central Asian Survey* 5 (1986): 148.

most of his term in office. As the republics sluggishly adopted new farming methods, they continued to rely on manual labour.⁷⁷

Cotton cultivation between 1953 and 1992

According to figure 2, which compiles from a multiplicity of sources from the Soviet Union, we can observe the broader historical trend that emerges.⁷⁸ Between 1953 and 1980, a steady increase in cotton production in Uzbekistan can be observed. Partial attribution lay at the increasing influx of mechanised farm equipment in the late 70s. During the five years between 1975 and 1980, an addition of eleven thousand harvesting machines improved productivity in the sector.⁷⁹ However, the ‘imaginary tonnes of Rashidov’ influenced this rise as well. In the late 1970s- and early 80s, cotton procurement figures were falsified by Rashidov. In combination with rampant corruption, it meant that cotton harvests annually reached artificial new heights. Therefore, the official state figures should be viewed cautiously.

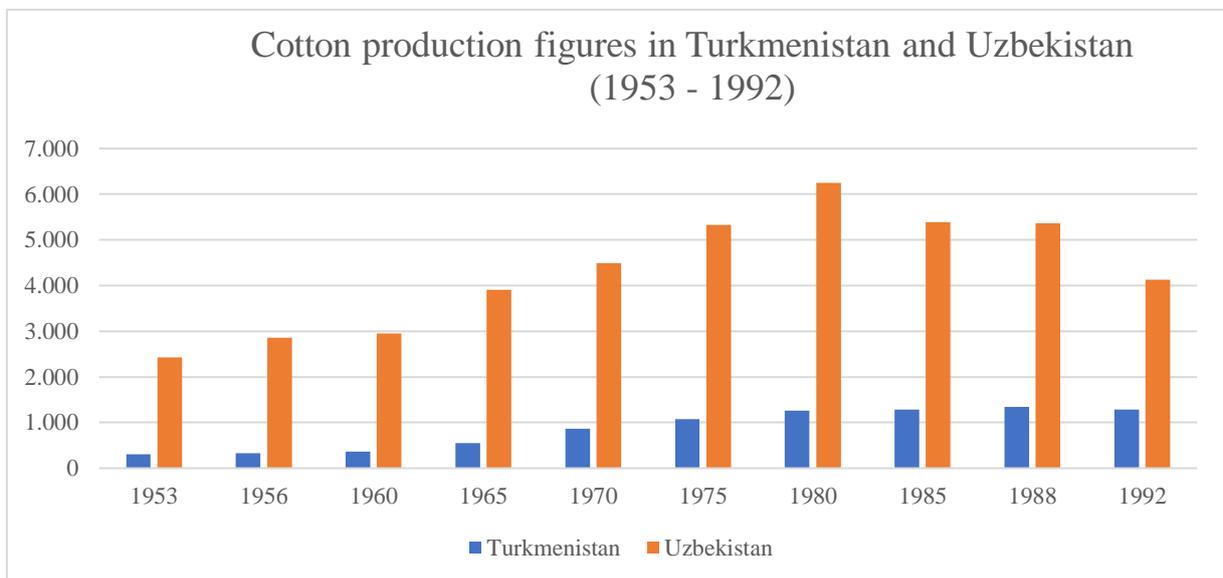


Figure 2. Cotton production figures in thousands of tonnes of raw cotton (1953 - 1992).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Gleason, “Sharaf Rashidov and the Dilemmas of National Leadership,” 149.

⁷⁸ Figures compiled from *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1958 godu* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe statisticheskoes izdatel'stvo, 1959), 369-382, and 419. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1961 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1962), 357. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1962 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1963), 281. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1967 godu* (Moscow: Statistika, 1968), 385. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1972 godu* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Statistika, 1973), 333. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1975 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1976), 367. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1979 godu* (Moscow: Statistika, 1980), 250. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 godu* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1986), 210. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1988 godu* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1989), 455. Entries are from tables identified as “Valovoi sbor (zakupki) khlopka-syrtsa po soiuznym respublikam.” and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Top 20 Countries Production of Seed cotton,” Food and Agricultural Organization, 1992.

⁷⁹ Peterson, “When a Pound Weighed a Ton: The Cotton Scandal and Uzbek National Consciousness,” 28.

⁸⁰ Gleason, “Marketization and Migration: The Politics of Cotton in Central Asia,” 67.

In 1980 cotton production peaked at 6.245.000 tonnes. After this peak, cotton output went down in Uzbekistan. Right after the fall of the Soviet Union, cotton production figures were at a similar height as in 1965, at approximately four million tonnes. When comparing production figures, we notice similar growth for Turkmenistan until 1980, after which its production plateaued. Turkmenistan hit its peak at 1.341.000 tonnes of cotton in 1988. The economic collapse and subsequent fall of the Soviet Union initially hardly influenced the Turkmen agricultural cotton sector, whilst in Uzbekistan it did.

Collectivised farming

One form of agricultural labour that has been mentioned but not yet discussed is labour on collectivised farms. This process had been completed in 1940. Collectivised farming was the dominant form of year-round agriculture in the Soviet Union.⁸¹ We utilise: the three moments of coercion by Van der Linden, which zoom in on three interrelated moments to visualise these mechanisms. This theory will aid us in determining the nature of collectivised farming. This tool looks at the three moments of coerced labour; (1) *The entry*: under which conditions do workers enter a particular labour relationship? (2) *Extraction*: the way an employer extracts labour from a labourer, under which conditions does this happen. (3) *Exit*: In which capacity, and how, are workers able to terminate their labour relationship?⁸² Thereby we are required to establish what coercion entails. In the case of labour coercion, there is a *coercer* and a *recipient of coercion*, whereby the coercer enforces a *compliant response* via a *coercive act*.⁸³ The coercive act can either be a free choice, constrained choice, or physical compulsion. A free choice is a voluntary act. A constrained choice encompasses an order from the coercer towards the recipient with physical harms at stake.⁸⁴ In the condition of physical compulsion, the recipient of coercion has nowhere to move to and is physically constrained.⁸⁵

(1) *The entry*

Why do workers enter a coerced labour relationship? In Chapter 1, we established that Turkmen peasants joined kolkhozes and sovkhozes under threat. During the collectivisation period, they were threatened with the revokement of their rights, banned from buying certain goods, and coerced to sell their cotton below market value. The former would indicate

⁸¹ Ajay Patnaik, "Agriculture and Rural Out-Migration in Central Asia, 1960-91," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47 (1995): 150.

⁸² Van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labour," in *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, 293-322.

⁸³ *Ibid.*: 296.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: 296.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 296.

pressure from kinship and community since local authorities would pressure them into collectivising. Additionally, forcibly selling privately-farmed cotton below market value constitutes more of a form of “involuntary debt”.⁸⁶ Van der Linden describes the latter as; “a loan is neither sought nor is the necessity for doing so present initially. Indebtedness is involuntary, and it appears as such.”⁸⁷ The peasants were unable to earn sufficient money. This was the result of local authorities which set an insufficient price for the cotton they themselves had ordered to be planted. This initial form of economic exploitation, on their private plots of land prior to the collectivisation, was marked by underpayment. As a result, peasants were obliged to join a collectivised farm. Underpayment persisted during and after collectivisation.⁸⁸ Sovkhoz workers saw a set wage, as opposed to kolkhoz workers who received a portion of the farm’s earnings. Although income in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was above the average remuneration in the Soviet Union, underpayment on collectivised farms, sovkhoz or kolkhoz, was still problematic.⁸⁹

(2) *The extraction*

Via which method did the employer extract labour from a labourer, and under which conditions does this happen? We will analyse compensation, coercion, and commitment. Peasants earned a salary on the sovkhoz, this was their compensation. Peasants on the kolkhoz were paid by the ‘residue’ of the farm. After the state had taken its part, in the form of taxes, the remaining money was for the *kolkhoznik*.⁹⁰ This however added a degree of insecurity since it was dependent on the success of the harvest. Additionally, social security did not exist for peasants, which did exist for urban workers.⁹¹ Lastly, the peasants on the kolkhozes were subject to discriminatory prices set by the government. Exorbitant prices had to be paid for products that kolkhozniks desired to purchase, whilst their produce was sold below market value.⁹² Peasants on collective farms were forced to work under threat to fulfil their cotton quotas. If not, they were exposed to harsh punishments that could range from confiscation of their private plots of land, on which they depended heavily to substitute their low income, to up to a year of labour in a corrective labour camp where conditions were even worse.⁹³

Officially, nobody owned or controlled the peasants. However, unofficially, peasants lost their

⁸⁶ Van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labour,” in *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, 302-303.

⁸⁷ Ibid.: 300-301.

⁸⁸ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, 207.

⁸⁹ Karl-Eugen Wadekin, “Income Distribution in Soviet Agriculture,” *Soviet Studies* 27 (1975): 13.

⁹⁰ Moshe Lewin, “Society and the Stalinist state in the period of the five year plans,” *Social History* 1 (1976): 165.

⁹¹ Lewin, “Society and the Stalinist state in the period of the five year plans,” 165.

⁹² Ibid.: 166.

⁹³ Fedor Belov, *The History of a Soviet Collective Farm* (New York: Praeger, 1955), 110-111.

mobility and independence, to an employer. In this case, the employer was the central state or local Soviet authorities. They were the coercer. The peasants who were forced to collectivise were the *recipient of coercion*. Communist principles indicate the equality of men and women, in practice, this was not as apparent.⁹⁴ Farmworkers on kolkhozes were constantly feared to be sabotaging agricultural works, whilst this was the result of agricultural mismanagement.⁹⁵ This constant treatment of peasants as second-class citizens, in a so-called ‘classless society’, is remarkable. Although, it is possible that there existed local commitment and pride to the communist cause, this is hard to measure.

(3) *The exit*

In contrast to workers in the Central Asian cities, freedom of movement did not exist for peasants on the kolkhozes. There existed a passport- and *propiska* system that restricted the movement of peasants.⁹⁶ In 1933, a new law was amended that only allowed peasants to leave the kolkhoz with a signed and ratified contract from their employer. Failing to do so was jailable for six months and called: “Disregard of the interests of the state.”⁹⁷ This would be an example of physical compulsion since the peasants were restricted in their spatial freedom since the farmer was forced to stay on the farm. There existed two ways to terminate the labour relationship. Impediment, or exit despite impediment.⁹⁸ Impediment means a perpetual continuation of labour relationship, whilst exit despite impediment, indicates an a-symmetrical termination by escape from the employee. Though the former was more common, the latter did occur. As noted, before, sometimes Turkmen decided to flee from their employer. This was observed at the start of the collectivisation process when tens of thousands of Turkmen fled to neighbouring Afghanistan and Persia. However, these examples are rather scarce thus most cotton workers did not have access to a viable form of exit. The labour regime essentially immobilised them on the farms.

Conditions and composition in Uzbekistan

The change in labour conditions and workforce composition during the harvest in Uzbekistan in this era is significant. Whereas before 1953, most labour was either done on collectivised farms or by prison labour, mass mobilisation of public workers became more common under

⁹⁴ Henry H. Collins, Jr., “The Constitutions of the Soviet Republics,” *Science & Society* 15 (1951): 28.

⁹⁵ Lewin, “Society and the Stalinist state in the period of the five year plans,” 164.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*: 165.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: 165-166.

⁹⁸ Van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labour,” in *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, 313.

the rule of Rashidov and Gapurov. This is visible in the composition of those who were employed to be cotton workers. Women rarely performed mechanised work on collective farms. According to Nancy Lubin, who has interviewed female agricultural workers, this is caused by the low interest of women in agricultural disciplines. This resulted in low enrolment in agricultural studies and a lack of skilled female workers in the mechanised harvesting sector.⁹⁹ Close to independence, more than half of the workforce in Uzbekistan on collective farms were women. This was caused by their unskilled labour position. In 1972, this number constituted approximately 98.8 per cent of manual labourers on state farms.¹⁰⁰ A shift in the ethnic make-up of forced labourers in Uzbekistan during the late era of Rashidov can be observed. In 1966, a 5.1-magnitude earthquake devastated Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. To rebuild the city, so-called friendship brigades consisting of inhabitants of other Soviet republics were sent. The influx of non-native Uzbek citizens changed the demographic composition of the region.¹⁰¹ However, the influx of citizens from other parts of the Soviet Union should not be overstated, since ethnically Uzbek and Turkmen families were regarded as the most important factor of population growth in Uzbekistan. European Soviets were a far smaller part of the overall population increase in the 1950s.¹⁰² What became an increasingly more common sight in the Uzbek cotton fields was the mass mobilisation of rural schoolchildren.¹⁰³ Children of the age of fourteen were forced to pick cotton for approximately two months per year. This was later expanded to all public employees.¹⁰⁴ Between the 1950s and 1970s, Central Asian countries enjoyed a high birth rate. The high fertility resulted in a young population with few old people. This meant that besides a cotton boom there also existed a baby boom. This demographic rise can be viewed in figure 3. This resulted in a deferral of mechanisation after the attempt in the 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁰⁵ The lack of necessity due to demographics, the nature of the cotton crop which only requires labour intensity during the harvest and the commitment of the Soviet Union to full employment laid at the root of the cause.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Lubin, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions," 184.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.: 184.

¹⁰¹ Nigel Raab, "The Tashkent Earthquake of 1966: The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Natural Tragedy," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 62 (2014): 274.

¹⁰² Smith, "Agricultural Involution in the Postwar Soviet Union," 69.

¹⁰³ Bilal A. Bhat, *Cotton Cultivation and Child Labor in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 33.

¹⁰⁴ Bhat, *Cotton Cultivation and Child Labor in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ Smith "Agricultural Involution in the Postwar Soviet Union," 69.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 69-70.

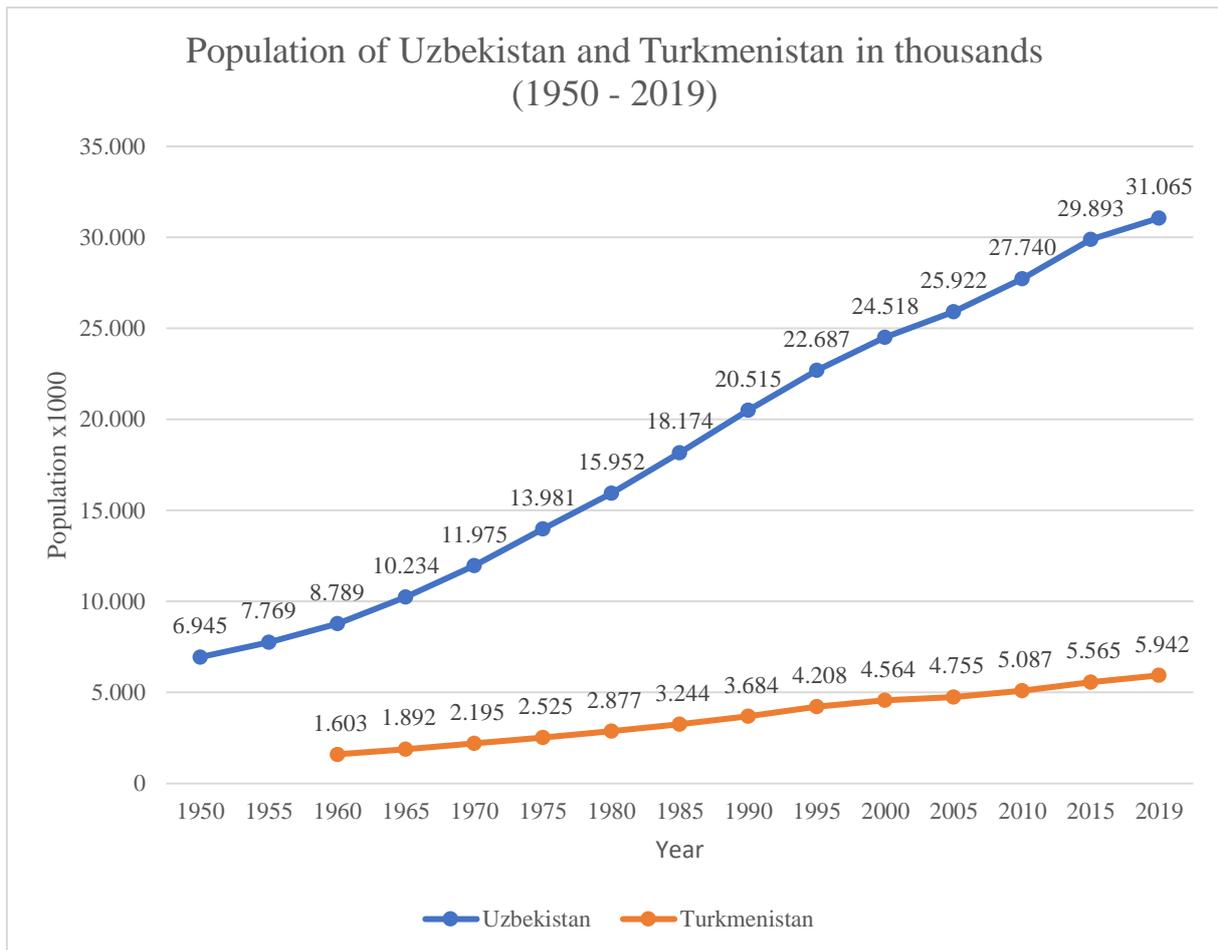


Figure 3. Population of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in thousands (1950 – 2019).¹⁰⁷

The Soviet demographer Aleksandr Kvasha stated, "The mechanisation of agriculture also facilitates the liberation of a part of the labour force. ... In the Republics of Central Asia these processes also continue, but their intensity is slowed down by (rapid growth of the population)".¹⁰⁸ In 1970, women and children constituted ninety per cent of the cotton pickers. During the harvest season, schools would close, and children were expected to pick cotton. Ordinarily, agricultural workers were expected to be paid, though cotton pickers in Uzbekistan were expected to fulfil harsh quotas before they were eligible to earn a wage.¹⁰⁹ Farmers devoted close to 1270 hours per hectare of agricultural land to the production of cotton. This was by far the most labour-intensive crop per hectare. This resulted in difficult labour conditions where each cotton plant had to be handpicked. Afterwards, heavy bags of

¹⁰⁷ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 10, and the United Nations Population Division, *World Population Prospects: 2019*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=TM>.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, "Agricultural Involvement in the Postwar Soviet Union," 70.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: 70.

cotton had to be dragged over the ground in the arid deserts.¹¹⁰ The work was described as tedious, uncomfortable labour that involved stooping down often, and was detested by all.¹¹¹ That a large number of citizens relied on work during the harvest. In 1986 and 1987, 650.000 to 700.000 schoolchildren, 140,000 students, and an unreported number of urban workers harvested cotton in Uzbekistan.¹¹² During this time, Uzbekistan supposedly harvested 5.365.000 tonnes of cotton, which speaks volumes on the burden carried by peasants.

Conditions and composition in Turkmenistan

Slow implementation of mechanisation was similarly a problem in Turkmenistan. There was an increase in the share of machine-harvested cotton in the 1960s and 1970s. However, due to poor implantation of machinery and local kolkhoz authorities favouring hand-picked cotton, the share of machine-picked cotton declined after the 1970s.¹¹³ This was not due to a lack of capital investment. The Soviet authorities invested a significant amount of money into the automation industry of Uzbekistan. Factories have been built in the Tashkent area which was also meant to supply Turkmenistan.¹¹⁴ This development, combined with the regulations implemented by their presidents, meant a continuing large reliance on physical forced labour. The Turkmen cotton industry experienced increased desertification, which was caused by an outdated water management system.¹¹⁵ Additionally, these increased droughts were caused by the large cotton fields which saw regular expansion.¹¹⁶ This chronic thirst was and still is, mitigated by the Karakum Canal. However, irrigating this arid region, will become a challenge in the future.

As in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan was in this period under the rule of a long-reigning leader. From 1969 until 1985; Muhammetnazar Gapurov ruled the republic. He can be linked to the expansion of cotton production.¹¹⁷ Gapurov failed to meet Turkmenistan's cotton quotas and was ousted in 1985. This was due to salinisation of the cotton fields which was

¹¹⁰ Smith, "Agricultural Involution in the Postwar Soviet Union," 70-71.

¹¹¹ Ibid.: 70.

¹¹² Pomfret, "State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia," 181.

¹¹³ Ibid.: 171-172.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.: 177.

¹¹⁵ Agustín Rodríguez, "The Road Ahead: What the death of Islam Karimov means for Uzbekistan and Central Asia," *Harvard International Review* 38 (2016): 41.

¹¹⁶ Rodríguez, "The Road Ahead: What the death of Islam Karimov means for Uzbekistan and Central Asia," 41.

¹¹⁷ Celestine Bohlen, "Cotton Measures Fortunes in Soviet Turkmenistan," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 1986, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/05/13/cotton-measures-fortunes-in-soviet-turkmenistan/45b5ef42-50ce-4a97-9e18-45bf8b39bd09/>.

caused by inadequate drainage.¹¹⁸ Despite failing to meet the set quota, hundreds of thousands were employed in the sector. The wage earned for a kilogramme of cotton in 1960 was approximately five kopeks.¹¹⁹ With mechanisation, fewer people would have been required for the harvest. However, it was not deemed to make economic sense, due to the immense labour pool from which both countries could draw. Pomfret estimates that mechanisation could have reduced the labour required for the harvest by 95 to 98 per cent, depending on weather and soil conditions.¹²⁰ The lack of an urge to mechanise demonstrates that costs for machines were considered not worth incurring to bring marginal machines into service. Cotton-harvester drivers were paid 100 to 200 sums per tonne picked, whilst a cotton picker could fetch at the end of the century approximately eight to nine sums per kilo. This would indicate a reduction in labour costs of approximately 97.5 per cent.¹²¹ The costs involved by hand pickers, as perceived by kolkhoz decision-makers, were depressed by the varying status of kolkhoz members and by the state's ability of mass mobilisation of students and urban workers. The improvements of labour conditions were not regarded as a priority.¹²² There also existed the fear of peasant uprisings if mechanisation had encroached on their private plots of land. These plots of land had been insurance in times of poor harvest in substituting income. Mechanisation would have disrupted the established division between collective and private land.¹²³

Conclusion

To summarise, collectivised farming which supplied the majority of the labour force annually was a form of forced labour. We demonstrated this via Van der Linden's moments of coercion theory. The entry: under which conditions do workers enter a particular labour relationship? Extraction: the way an employer extracts labour from a labourer and the Exit: In which capacity, and how, are workers able to terminate their labour relationship. Mechanisation during this period was marked by an apathetic approach by Uzbekistan's leader Rashidov, largely relying on the manual harvesting of cotton. This was caused by the lack of necessity due to demographics, the nature of the cotton crop, commitment to full employment and fear of an uprising. The late seventies saw a renewed attempt at mechanisation as the Soviet Union

¹¹⁸ Celestine Bohlen, "Cotton Measures Fortunes in Soviet Turkmenistan," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 1986, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/05/13/cotton-measures-fortunes-in-soviet-turkmenistan/45b5ef42-50ce-4a97-9e18-45bf8b39bd09/>.

¹¹⁹ Pomfret, "State-Directed Diffusion of Technology: The Mechanization of Cotton Harvesting in Soviet Central Asia," 182.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*: 180.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*: 180.

¹²² *Ibid.*: 180.

¹²³ *Ibid.*: 181.

pushed ever-growing cotton quotas forward. Mechanisation would have made economic sense, but it was deemed not to be worth the investment. We observed a shift from collectivised farming and prison labour, as seen before 1953, to collectivised farming and mass mobilisation of public workers, continued by Rashidov and Gapurov. This is caused by an abandonment of prison camp labour, a rapid increase of cotton production, and slow adoption of mechanised harvesting. During this period, women and children started to increasingly carry the burden of the cotton harvest.

The three moments of coercion is a very helpful tool in answering whether a certain form of labour is forced labour. However, the section on commitment is hard to answer and problematic because of the lack of written sources on the commitment of kolkhozniks. Therefore, his theory limits my capabilities to answer whether collectivised farming is a form of forced labour. I am not convinced by the importance of commitment, but most of his theory can be adopted to discuss historical labour regimes.

Chapter 3: The fledging paths of independence

In the third chapter, we will discuss the effects and changes that have occurred resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chapter 3 is divided into two parts. The first half focuses on the evolution of forced labour after independence. Both republics stood at the beginning of a new era, with old leaders. We will employ the sub-question: *How did the use of forced labour in the cotton sector change after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan?* With the historical change of labour coercion in both republics, it is important to examine the dimensions which facilitated forced labour. We will analyse this via Crane's theory, as we did in Chapter 1. However, we will only discuss the industry, geographic and regulatory dimensions, because they hold the most relevance in this chapter.

The historical context

On December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union officially disbanded. The republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were to transition from socialist state-run economies to market-based capitalist economies. They did this with hesitancy, seeing as they backed the 1991 August coup.¹²⁴ One would imagine reforms to be passed to bridge this difficult transition period. The leader of Uzbekistan after independence from 1991 until 2016 was Islam Karimov. However, he was also the president of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic before independence. The situation in Turkmenistan is comparable. Their leader during the final days of the Soviet Union was Saparmurat Niyazov. After independence, he continued to be president of Turkmenistan until 2006. After which he was succeeded by Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov. Leadership that was created during the Soviet Union could facilitate continuity more probable. It is this period that we observe, change, and divergence.

Since the introduction of the cotton monoculture, dependence had continued to exist. This dependence was fuelled by former policies. It ensured that when Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan became independent countries, their role in the world economy was set in stone. The lack of privatisation initiated by the Uzbek government and continued employment of state-imposed forced cotton pickers are signs of this.¹²⁵ However, what is visible in Uzbekistan after independence is that due to the de-mechanisation process, much younger

¹²⁴ Angus Roxburgh, "Republics look to a future after the fall: As the world's last empire breaks apart, the Guardian profiles the 15 aspiring additions to the community of sovereign nations," *The Guardian*, August 27, 1991, 3, <https://www-proquestcom.proxy.library.uu.nl/hnpguardianobserver/docview/187231604/6799D22B06014288PQ/1?accountid=14772>.

¹²⁵ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 19-20.

children were forced to participate in the cotton fields.¹²⁶ The employment of *hokims* became more commonplace. Hokims are responsible for delivering the quotas but are often incapable of procuring sufficient voluntary pickers. Thus, they distribute quotas among institutions, which in turn distribute quotas among its workers. The availability of voluntary pickers is unreliable since the longer the harvest lasts, the less money is to be made. Coerced pickers ensure a steady labour supply.¹²⁷ On one account from 2017, a picker was required to pick 80 kilogrammes by working 20 hours per day. He did this under threat of punishment.¹²⁸

In Turkmenistan, a continuation of *Subbotnik* work, or Saturday work, takes place where civil servants and governmental linked professions are required to pick cotton under threat of salary reduction, dismissal, or other penalties. Local administrators are threatened with unemployment if they fail to meet their quotas. This system stems from the rigid centralised government, inherited from the Soviet Union, which sets a national quota for that year, after which regional governors are assigned their regional quota. This quota is subdivided into quotas per school, hospital, or other public institution after which each staff member receives its quota.¹²⁹ Each person could be expected to pick fifty kilogrammes of cotton per day.¹³⁰ Children in Turkmenistan are expected to pick cotton alongside their parents when childcare cannot be guaranteed to the parents or when parents are at risk of not meeting their quotas. However, higher-salaried personnel are allowed to pay others to pick the cotton in their name to reach quotas.¹³¹ Initially, it appears as if little had changed in both republics.

Cotton cultivation between 1993 and 2017

When examining the agricultural cotton output in this period we observe for both countries a clear historical trend. The gradual decline in Uzbek cotton output becomes visible. Where in 1993 the country produced 4.235.000 tonnes of cotton, a decade later this had decreased to 2.823.000 tonnes. This was caused by new land reforms that failed to extend to any other

¹²⁶ Bhat, *Cotton Cultivation and Child Labor in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan*, 33.

¹²⁷ Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, *'We Pick Cotton Out of Fear': Systematic Forced Labor and the Accountability Gap in Uzbekistan* (Berlin: UGF, 2018), 20.

¹²⁸ Uzbek Forum for Human Rights, *'We Pick Cotton Out of Fear': Systematic Forced Labor and the Accountability Gap in Uzbekistan* (Berlin: UGF, 2018), 1.

¹²⁹ Adam Hug, "Introduction: Putting the spotlight on Turkmenistan," *The Foreign Policy Centre*, July 12, 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/introduction-putting-the-spotlight-on-turkmenistan/>.

¹³⁰ Adam Hug, "Introduction: Putting the spotlight on Turkmenistan," *The Foreign Policy Centre*, July 12, 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/introduction-putting-the-spotlight-on-turkmenistan/>.

¹³¹ Adam Hug, "Introduction: Putting the spotlight on Turkmenistan," *The Foreign Policy Centre*, July 12, 2019, <https://fpc.org.uk/introduction-putting-the-spotlight-on-turkmenistan/>.

facets of the agricultural sector, such as water management.¹³² Whilst its production does ascend after 2003 to approximately 3.750.000 tonnes, where it remained for several years. Over time, this procurement figure descended back to its low point in 2003, at approximately 2.850.000. In Turkmenistan, this decline was more fluctuating. In the previous chapter, we had established the plateauing and even a slight increase in cotton production. However, in 1996, it could only output a third of what it had the year prior.

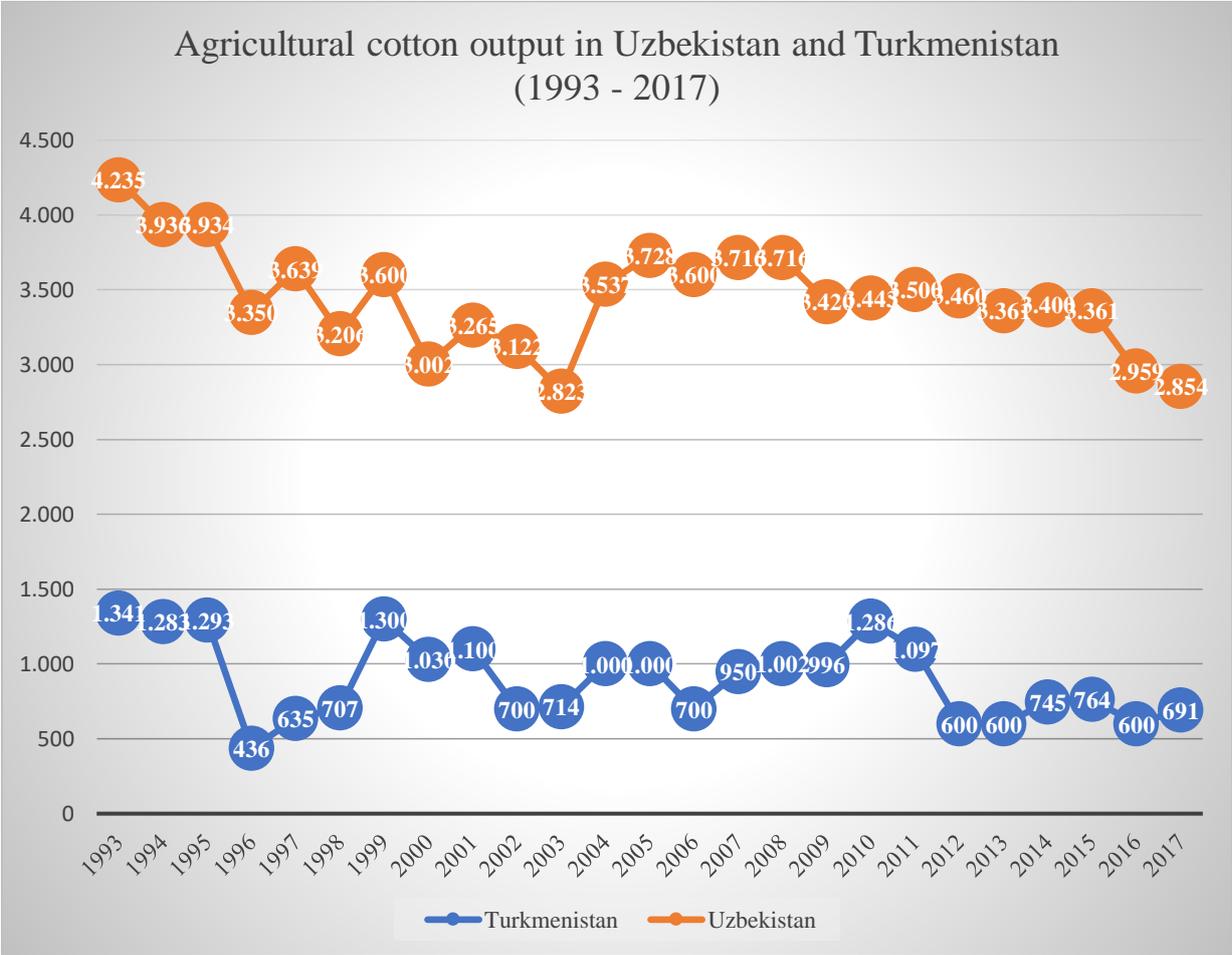


Figure 4. Agricultural cotton output in thousands of tonnes in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (1993 - 2017).¹³³

Although production figures do increase, the average tends to remain approximately 800.000 to 900.000 tonnes between 2000 and 2012. We can conclude that Turkmen cotton production output remains more stable from 1953 to 2017. Uzbek agricultural cotton output has decreased over the years, as has its percentage of exports. In 1992, ninety per cent of Uzbekistan’s exports were cotton, whereas in 2016 this figure had decreased to 3.4 per

¹³² Iskandar Abdullaev, Mark Giordano, and Aziz Rasulov, “Cotton in Uzbekistan: Water and Welfare,” in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Iskandar Abdullaev, and John Baffes (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007), 108.

¹³³ Chart based on: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Top 20 Countries Production of Seed cotton,” Food and Agricultural Organization, 1992-2017, http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#rankings/countries_by_commodity.

cent.¹³⁴ In light of the decrease in this figure, it becomes apparent that the Uzbek economy has diversified its export-focused economy. Additionally, the state has also emphasised the importance of domestic wheat production now that the Soviet Union has fallen away as its main food supplier. The state expanded the winter wheat area from 620,000 hectares in 1991 to 1.200.000 hectares in 2004, to fulfil demand.¹³⁵

Crane on post-Soviet forced labour

There must be a reason why both countries have initially persisted in their use of a system that annually, systematically, and forcibly employs its citizens to harvest cotton. In Turkmenistan, this happens on a smaller scale than in Uzbekistan. If we take into consideration the part of Crane's theory on the existence of forced labour, we can establish the dimensions which have to be present to explain the presence of modern forced labour. Hereby, the existence of the industry context, geographical and regulatory are analysed.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the industry context stipulates certain industries which are more prone to forced labour. The agricultural sector, as in Chapter 1, is at this point still prone to forced labour. However, we observe a shift in mechanisation, which is an important aspect of the agricultural sector. During the communist era, there was resentment towards mechanised cotton which has transferred over to the new republics. Additionally, the central state mandates low prices for farmed cotton, which assures that farmers cannot afford to purchase harvester machines.¹³⁶ This became apparent by the collapse of cotton farming machinery production in the 1990s, thereby forcing an increasing number of citizens to partake in the farming of cotton, on fields laid by the Soviet central government with mechanised farming in mind, whilst only having hand pickers to spare. A cotton combine harvester can pick up to 250 tonnes of cotton per season, which is equal to the amount picked by the pupils of an average village school in the same period.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 10.

¹³⁵ Abdullaev, Giordano, and Rasulov, "Cotton in Uzbekistan: Water and Welfare," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 115.

¹³⁶ Nadejda Atayeva and Dmitry Belomestnov, *Forced Labour in Uzbekistan* (Le Mans: AHRCA, 2010), 8.

¹³⁷ Nadejda Atayeva and Dmitry Belomestnov, *Forced Labour in Uzbekistan* (Le Mans: AHRCA, 2010), 8.



Picture 5. Uzbek cotton pickers during the 2018 harvest.¹³⁸

The continued existence of forced labour in both countries can still be attributed to the isolationism of the region. Both countries are landlocked and border countries that do not hold democratic values high. The vastness and hot temperatures make it difficult for escaped forced labourers to move away from the region or country. The nomads of Turkmenistan have been known to move to other countries during the early days of collectivisation, since controlling the border was hard for the Soviet Union. However, these days, extensive border patrols are a reality in both countries.¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the smaller scale on which Turkmenistan employs forced labour is partially due to the smaller size of the cotton industry and partially because the country relies much less on cotton than Uzbekistan does. Turkmenistan has access to vast deposits of minerals, raw materials, oil, and gas, which lessens the dependence on agricultural products.¹⁴¹

On the regulatory dimension, we observe a shift caused by the breakup of the Soviet Union. Policy change disbanded the kolkhozes and sovkhoses and private farmers were allocated small plots of land.¹⁴² This was partially done to mitigate future food shortages,

¹³⁸ Picture from: Mehdi Mahbub, "Uzbekistan, a potential source of textile products and cotton," *Textile Today*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.textiletoday.com.bd/uzbekistan-potential-source-textile-products-cotton/>.

¹³⁹ John C. K. Daly, "Despite Proclaimed Neutrality, Turkmenistan Increases Border Defenses," *The Jamestown Foundation*, February 26, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/despite-proclaimed-neutrality-turkmenistan-increases-border-defenses/>.

¹⁴⁰ Nick Solly Megoran, "To survive, villagers buck Uzbek border controls," *EurasiaNet*, May 25, 2004, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/46cc3212c.html>.

¹⁴¹ David Nissman, "Turkmenistan (Un)transformed," *Current History* 93 (1994): 183.

¹⁴² Abdullaev, Giordano, and Rasulov, "Cotton in Uzbekistan: Water and Welfare," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 104-105.

since Uzbekistan had been reliant on imports from the Soviet Union. In 1995, all quotas were lifted in Uzbekistan, except those on cotton.¹⁴³ In 2003, policies were set to prioritise the development of individual farms as the major producer of agricultural commodities.¹⁴⁴ The disintegration of collectivised farming is an important development in the eradication of year-round forced labour, but mass mobilisation is still necessary during the harvest season. In Turkmenistan, the newly adopted constitution forbids forced labour, except in situations established by the law. Employees have a right to be compensated and it may not be less than the governmentally established subsistence minimum.¹⁴⁵ These laws demonstrate the continued possibility to engage in the employment of forced labourers.

¹⁴³ Abdullaev, Giordano, and Rasulov, "Cotton in Uzbekistan: Water and Welfare," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 115.

¹⁴⁴ Abdullaev, Giordano, and Rasulov, "Cotton in Uzbekistan: Water and Welfare," in *The Cotton Sector in Central Asian Economy Policy and Developments Challenges*, 109.

¹⁴⁵ Turkmenistan Constitution of 1992, section 2, article XXXI, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_isn=39131&p_lang=en.

Chapter 3.1: Diverging leaders

So far, we have analysed the history of forced labour in the cotton sector in both republics. Additionally, we have determined the changes and continuations of forced labour during and after the fall of the Soviet Union. This last portion of my thesis will be devoted to explaining why both countries diverged. We will employ the following sub-question: *What caused the sudden decline of forced labour in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, how does it break with the past and what effect does it have on cotton production?* In this chapter, we will utilise the path dependency theory, to determine whether leadership change in both republics influenced their labour regimes. In this period the divergence between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan becomes clearer and more explicit.

Path-dependency

Path dependency requires a clear critical juncture. It can help us answer the question of what role forced labour plays in the contemporary state of the countries' respective industries since a sudden change during the critical juncture can help us explain a clear break with the past. Matthew Lange defines path dependence as a concept that suggests that the causal impact of factors can vary over time. Therefore, there is a period of flux during which a factor has substantially more impact on the overall change. Where normally there is more stability which is caused by lock-in mechanisms that make changes normally more difficult to happen.¹⁴⁶ There are two components related to path dependence: the critical juncture and the lock-in mechanisms.¹⁴⁷ To ensure continuity within this section of Uzbek and Turkmen history there must be a lock-in mechanism. Therefore, looking at which lock-in mechanisms were present in Uzbek and Turkmen society that have led to this change in a somewhat continuous fashion.

Pre-critical juncture

When observing the critical juncture, it is essential to determine the pre-critical juncture era. Thus, we must establish whether the critical juncture era is a period of rapid change. If the pre-critical juncture era is a period of rapid change as well, then the critical juncture era might not break with the past. This would make it merely a continuation of rapid change, a

¹⁴⁶ Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*, 85.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 79.

continuity.¹⁴⁸ The pre-critical starts close to the introduction of collectivised farming, which I have argued before constitutes forced labour. The critical juncture starts with the death of the old leaders of both republics. What must be established in the pre-critical juncture era is a certain continuity. In the previous chapters, institutionalisation of collectivised farming established itself as a form of labour coercion. In combination with cotton quotas, this makes for a country prone to forced labour which has been upheld by Karimov, even after foreign pressure. In 1991, Karimov promised an end to forced labour and democratic elections, both promises he did not retain. According to the Association of Human Rights in Central Asia, Karimov and his government knew of the implementation of forced labour and acted in a manner to uphold the status quo. Uzbekistan's chief union leader has been accorded the status of minister, which is a clear example of cronyism.¹⁴⁹ Uzbek farmers were arrested after they had scheduled to meet with Karimov. They expressed their intention to discuss the problems cotton farmers faced. Ganikhon Mamatkhanov, who initiated this, was convicted to five years in prison.¹⁵⁰ Karimov had shown little intention in changing the labour conditions.

Critical juncture

According to James Mahoney, the critical juncture consists of two components. Firstly, there is a point where a particular option is adopted from a minimum of two alternatives. If there is no choice, there cannot exist a critical juncture.¹⁵¹ Secondly, the critical juncture must be a choice point that closes off important future outcomes. This means not treating each choice point as a critical juncture, but only those that are indispensable for future outcomes.¹⁵² When we apply this to our case, in which we compare regime changes on the divergence of policy in both countries we can view the changes as either a break from the past or a continuation.

The deaths of Niyazov and Karimov marked the end of an era. Niyazov led Turkmenistan from 1985 to 1988, and from 1989 to 1991 as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan. Additionally, he was President for Life until 2006. Similarly, Karimov was Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan from 1989 to 1991 and subsequently President of Uzbekistan until 2016. Their deaths could have been a period of reform as it gave the new leaders a possibility to cut with the past, because both leaders took office during the

¹⁴⁸ Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*, 75.

¹⁴⁹ Nadejda Atayeva and Dmitry Belomestnov, *Forced Labour in Uzbekistan* (Le Mans: AHRCA, 2010), 7.

¹⁵⁰ Nadejda Atayeva and Dmitry Belomestnov, *Forced Labour in Uzbekistan* (Le Mans: AHRCA, 2010), 7.

¹⁵¹ James Mahoney, "Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36 (2001): 113.

¹⁵² Mahoney, "Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective," 113.

Soviet Union. Their deaths in 2006 and 2016 provides us with a critical juncture. Both countries could reform their policies now that leadership change took place and alter communist-era policies. Only after their deaths could their policies towards forced labour fade out, as they actively upheld forced labour.

What we observe in Uzbekistan after regime change is an increase in legislation that makes it harder to realise forced labour. The ILO had previously observed child labour from 2013 to 2015 in the cotton harvest seasons of Uzbekistan. When we observe the development of labour practises in Uzbekistan, we notice that child labour is practically non-existent from 2017 onwards. The new President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, gave a speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2017 in which he proclaimed that the newly instated five-year plans contained effective measures to eradicate child- and forced labour.¹⁵³ This was done in cooperation with the ILO. Afterwards, measures were taken on a national level to implement a policy of voluntary recruitment for the cotton harvest in Uzbekistan.¹⁵⁴ For example, the prohibition of any forced recruitment of students or education and medical personnel. However, in 2017 there appeared to still be an insufficient system to enforce the abolition of fees for replacement pickers to recruiters.¹⁵⁵ This is problematic because it means officials can shift picking duties to citizens. The new president, which in all regards is still authoritarian, has chosen to lean towards a more internationally acceptable policy. This does not merely limit itself to child labour. According to the ILO, there is a strong commitment to eradicate all forms of forced labour on Uzbek cotton fields. This comes from both national as well as local levels of government.¹⁵⁶ Mirziyoyev has been the head of the agricultural sector of Uzbekistan for more than a decade before succeeding Karimov, which indicates that he has experience in this field of governance.

According to Lange, there exist four types of lock-in mechanisms. These mechanisms would ensure that the changes that have manifested during the critical juncture would stay in place.¹⁵⁷ (1) The rational-choice mechanism, the cost of radical change is much greater than that of maintaining the present social relations. (2) The power mechanism, powerful factors value the importance of the status quo and will use their power to prevent change. (3) The

¹⁵³ United Nations, General Assembly Seventy-second session 5th plenary meeting Tuesday, September 19, 2017, <https://undocs.org/en/A/72/PV.5>, 14.

¹⁵⁴ ILO Newsroom, "Uzbekistan ends systematic use of child labour and takes measures to end forced labour," *International Labour Organization*, December 12 2017, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_613562/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁵⁵ ILO Newsroom, "Uzbekistan ends systematic use of child labour and takes measures to end forced labour," *International Labour Organization*, December 12, 2017, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_613562/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁵⁶ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 13.

¹⁵⁷ Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*, 70.

cognitive mechanism, which means that through cognitive blinders, one cannot see any alternatives. (4) The lock-in mechanism of norms. This makes it possible for individuals to perceive the status quo as normatively desirable and assure the perpetuation of the status quo.¹⁵⁸ There were lock-in mechanisms that either kept the status quo in place or the changed, post-critical juncture in place and subsequently have allowed the radical changes since the critical juncture to flourish.

(1). In Uzbekistan, I detect two of Lange's lock-in mechanisms. Firstly, the exogenous factor that kept this change in place was pressure from foreign countries on the improvement of working conditions. This has played a role in accelerating policy change in Uzbekistan. According to Foreign Policy, the cotton boycott and fears for future boycotts have accelerated reforms in the cotton industry.¹⁵⁹ This pressure may be considered a rational-choice mechanism since reverting to a system of forced labour could be expensive through the loss of foreign buyers for cotton crops. Therefore, it is more lucrative to not employ forced labour, or at least live up to international standards on labour regimes. This foreign pressure, which in Uzbekistan kept changes in place after the critical juncture, has not affected Turkmenistan since no change has taken place. Even after a letter initiated by the Cotton Campaign and signed by 57 companies, NGO's and investors addressed to Turkmenistan's president in 2016.¹⁶⁰ The previous president, Karimov, had introduced the ideology of *Mustaqillik*, which is a combination of self-victimization and pride in the renaissance of the Uzbek nation to legitimate the new course of independent Uzbekistan represented by him.¹⁶¹ Thus, despite continuing the employment of forced labour in the cotton sector, a strong urge to de-sovietise was present. 93,9 per cent of Uzbek was against voting in favour of remaining in the Soviet Union. During most of Karimov's reign, the country became de-sovietised whereby *Mustaqillik* replaced the state-ideology.¹⁶² By the time that Karimov was succeeded by Mirziyoyev in 2017, *Mustaqillik* would make it considerably harder to reverse the changes initiated by Mirziyoyev. The newly adopted *Mustaqillik* and the rejection of the Soviet past can be attributed to the lock-in mechanism norm because the policy is deeply rooted in the educational system and cultural legacy since independence.

¹⁵⁸ Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, and Oybek Shaykhov, "The Boycott on Uzbek Cotton Needs to End," *Foreign Policy*, March 28, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/28/international-cotton-boycott-uzbekistan/>.

¹⁶⁰ Cotton Campaign, "Cotton Campaign coalition letter to the government of Turkmenistan, signed by 57 companies, human rights NGOs, industry associations, investors, and trade unions, calling for urgent action to end forced labor in the cotton sector of Turkmenistan," May 25, 2016, http://www.cottoncampaign.org/uploads/3/9/4/7/39474145/multi-stakeholder_letter_to_turkmenistan_president2016.pdf.

¹⁶¹ Cucciolla, "Legitimation through Self-Victimization," 661.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*: 661.

(2). In the case of Turkmenistan, intense corruption and the Soviet legacy appear to be the lock-in mechanisms. They ensured continuity to stay in place, rather than the discontinuity we observed in Uzbekistan.¹⁶³ This divergence is a development that can be attributed to the widespread and intense corruption, which has made it more likely that women and children are disproportionately targeted.¹⁶⁴ Women in Central Asia are more likely to be targeted because they are employed more often in educational, health, and cultural institutions, where corruption happens more often.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, children are often required to replace their parents since their labour avoids the collapse of public services. The focus on women as pickers is a continuation, which we have discussed before where women constituted the majority of hand pickers in the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁶ According to Farid Tukhbatullin, founder, and director of the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, which provides independent news and information on Turkmenistan through the Chronicles of Turkmenistan website, numerous human rights reports are farmers still tied to their land. He notes; “They have to follow the practises and laws that are leftover and the legacy of the Soviet Union, that prevent them from leaving their regions and going to work elsewhere for a long period because they have to register locally.”¹⁶⁷ This is reminiscent of the propiska-system during the period of collective farming. This can be combined with the cotton quotas to argue that time has not moved forward in Turkmenistan, whilst it has in Uzbekistan. The perpetuation of corruption in Turkmenistan can be attributed as a power mechanism since the corrupt officials find it normatively desirable to retain the current system in place since they appear to benefit from it. The Soviet legacy can be regarded as the lock-in mechanism norm because the form of governance and ownership is deeply rooted in the system via education and culture. Uzbekistan has experienced heavy enforcement of its newly amended laws to avoid corruption, with 259 government officials, heads of organisations, and managers punished via fines.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Marek Grzegorzcyk, “Forced labour still prevalent in Turkmenistan cotton harvest,” *Emerging Europe*, May 4, 2021, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/forced-labour-still-prevalent-in-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest/>.

¹⁶⁴ Marek Grzegorzcyk, “Forced labour still prevalent in Turkmenistan cotton harvest,” *Emerging Europe*, May 4, 2021, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/forced-labour-still-prevalent-in-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest/>.

¹⁶⁵ Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, *Review of Turkmenistan under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (Vienna: TIHR, 2012), 4, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/TKM/INT_CEDAW_NGO_TKM_13204_E.pdf.

¹⁶⁶ Marek Grzegorzcyk, “Forced labour still prevalent in Turkmenistan cotton harvest,” *Emerging Europe*, May 4, 2021, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/forced-labour-still-prevalent-in-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest/>.

¹⁶⁷ Marek Grzegorzcyk, “Forced labour still prevalent in Turkmenistan cotton harvest,” *Emerging Europe*, May 4, 2021, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/forced-labour-still-prevalent-in-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest/>.

¹⁶⁸ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 7.

Post-juncture era

The ILO established that no systemic or systematic forced labour was exacted through instructions and policies of the Government of Uzbekistan during the 2019 cotton harvest. This becomes visible in figure 5. In 2015 and 2016, the ILO had established the percentage of forced to be approximately thirteen to fourteen per cent total cotton picker workforce. After Mirziyoyev ascend to power and the vows made at the United Nations, we observe a rapid decline in employment of forced labourers and a rise in wages for cotton pickers. However, forced labour is still present in Uzbekistan on more uneven local forms of policy implementation which goes against the centrally governmental plans.¹⁶⁹ We can establish this via figure 5, where four to six per cent forced labour is still monitored, which can be attributed to the uneven local forms of policy implementation and continued employment of conscripts, which the ILO considers to be forced labour.¹⁷⁰ There are still centrally set quotas for cotton production, which are a legacy of the centrally planned economy established during the Soviet Union, which still increases the risk of forced labour.¹⁷¹ This explains the current four per cent forced labour in the total percentage of the picker workforce. Where in 2015, fourteen per cent of cotton pickers were forced to do so, this declined to thirteen per cent in 2017 and has since decreased to 5.9 per cent in 2019. In the meantime, wages have gone up.¹⁷² A decline in forced labour is observable in Uzbekistan from 2015 onwards.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 19-20.

¹⁷⁰ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 7.

¹⁷¹ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 20.

¹⁷² International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 6.

¹⁷³ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 5.

Chart: Wages and forced labour percentages (2015-2020)

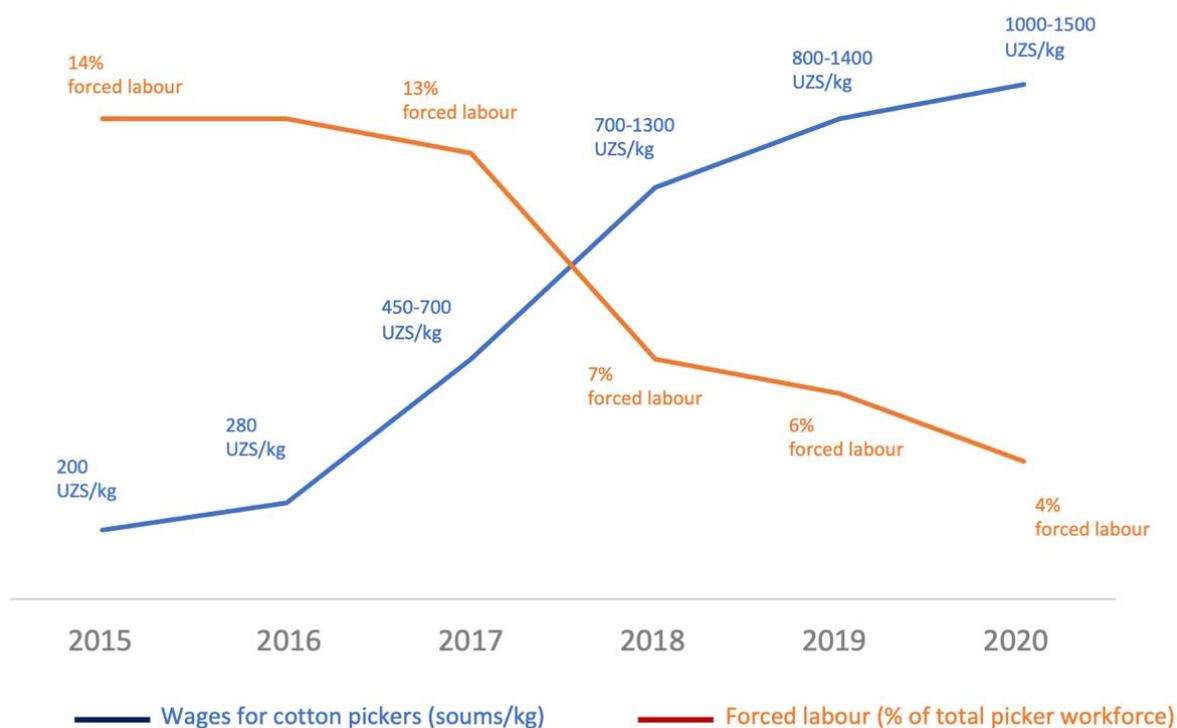


Figure 5. Wages and forced labour percentages in Uzbekistan (2015-2020).¹⁷⁴

The Uzbek government achieved this by bypassing key legislation and presidential decrees which have increased regulations and raised labour standards whilst expanding monitoring capabilities. The transfer of citizens to pick cotton was also explicitly prohibited via article 95 of the Labour Code.¹⁷⁵ The Uzbek government reformed its agricultural sector, which the ILO has confirmed reduces forced labour. The government aims to diversify and reduce its dependency on the production of raw cotton.¹⁷⁶ The Uzbek authorities aim for a complete abolishment of the quota system and replacing it with a model which is more akin to a market-based system. Where the government previously employed a cotton cultivation target, it has abolished this in 2020.¹⁷⁷ The gradual mechanisation has resulted in a reduction of the overall number of pickers required for the cotton harvest.

¹⁷⁴ Chart from: International Labour Organization, “Systemic forced labour and child labour has come to an end in Uzbek cotton,” 29 January, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/washington/news/WCMS_767753/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁷⁵ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 15.

¹⁷⁶ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 5.

¹⁷⁷ Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj and Oybek Shaykhov, “The Boycott on Uzbek Cotton Needs to End,” *Foreign Policy*, March 28, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/28/international-cotton-boycott-uzbekistan/>.

Cotton production, workforce and forced pickers (2015-2019)

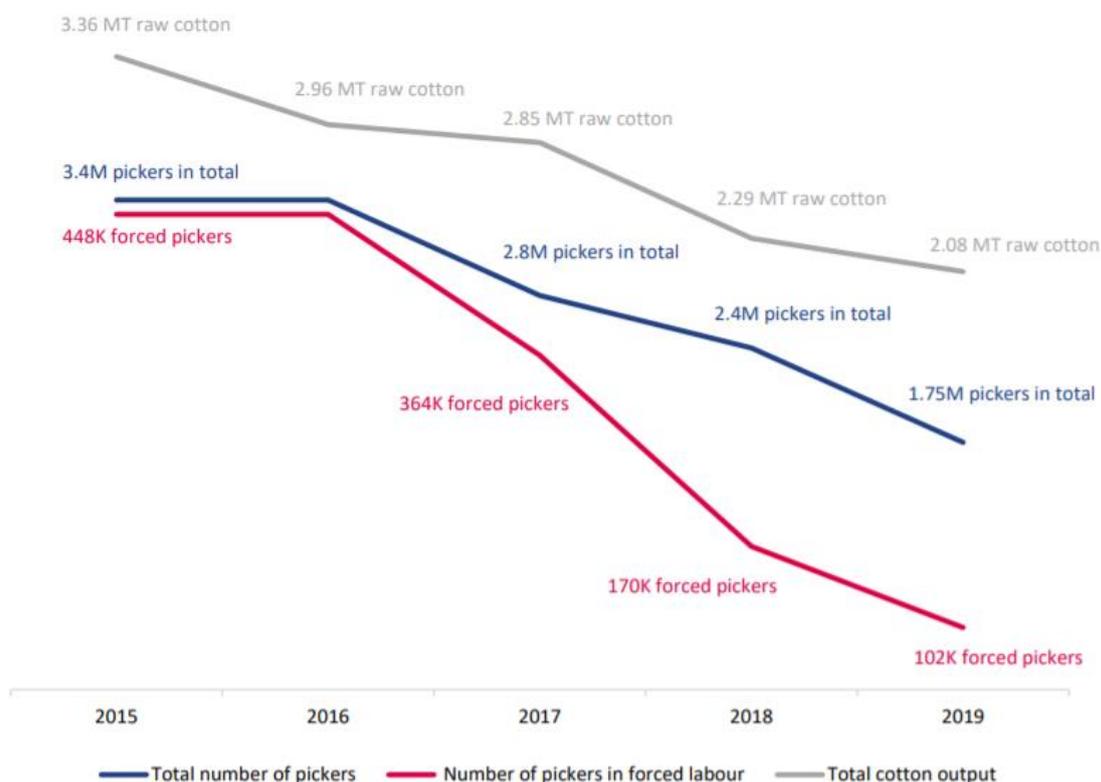


Figure 6. Cotton production, workforce and forced pickers in Uzbekistan (2015-2019).¹⁷⁸

The employment of a new labour recruitment programme aims to recruit voluntary pickers by favouring economic incentives, in the form of wages rather than force. The average cotton picker worked 23 days and earned an average of 2.200.000 Uzbek sums.¹⁷⁹ Since the mechanisation process is only gradually coming to fruition, hand-picked cotton is still more common than mechanised harvested cotton. However, the employment of soldiers, prisoners, and pickers under the idea of *hashar* was still monitored.¹⁸⁰ Picking under *hashar* implies that pickers were led to believe that cotton picking was still mandatory and is used by local administrators to reach cotton quotas.¹⁸¹ The Uzbek government employs military conscripts to bridge the employment gap caused by the sudden prohibition of forced labour. Additionally, hundreds of Uzbeks complained during the 2019 harvest about forced labour disguised as

¹⁷⁸ Chart from: International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 5.

¹⁷⁹ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 6.

¹⁸⁰ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 48.

¹⁸¹ International Labour Organisation, *Third-party monitoring of child labour and forced labour during the 2019 cotton harvest in Uzbekistan* (Geneva: ILO, 2020), 8.

volunteer work.¹⁸² These forms of employment could be considered the third wave of cotton pickers because the composition is significantly different.

In Turkmenistan, we observe a different development. In 2005, president Niyazov signed a bill outlawing forced labour of children.¹⁸³ However, two years later his successor, Berdymukhamedov, did the same by banning forced labour in the agricultural sector for children and students.¹⁸⁴ We observe the predecessor making strides towards the improvement of working conditions and outlawing some forms of labour before his death, but his predecessor repeated this move. We can establish this as an affirmation of his predecessor's decision. It appears that Turkmenistan's initial push towards child-labour-free cotton was cut short. Even its second round of reforms, initiated by the new president, has come under scrutiny as independent observers appear to observe the continued use of forced labour. It is however notable that both new leaders initiated this policy reform right after their ascension to leadership. However, where systemic use of child and forced labour has ended in Uzbekistan, this is not the case in Turkmenistan.¹⁸⁵ The continuation of Niyazov's policies has not been broken by Berdymukhammedov in many but the most extreme policies.¹⁸⁶ The authorities of Turkmenistan force public sector workers to pick cotton or hire a replacement worker. They do this under the threat of losing their job.¹⁸⁷ According to Kathleen Collins, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Minnesota, as of 2009 Berdymukhammedov had engaged in little liberalisation.¹⁸⁸ As of May 2018, the United States banned the import of Turkmen cotton and products produced with it. According to Human Rights Watch, the ban was initiated two years after Alternative Turkmenistan News and the International Labour Rights Forum petitioned the United States Customs and Border Protection to do so. This was due to the continued employment of forced labour in the cotton

¹⁸² Ron Synovitz, "Uzbek State Workers Say They're Still Being Forced to Pick Cotton," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/30843866.html>.

¹⁸³ Osman Hallyev, and Charles Recknagel, "Children Back at Work in Turkmenistan's Cotton Fields," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 18, 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/cotton-child-labor-turkmenistan/25141281.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Osman Hallyev, and Charles Recknagel, "Children Back at Work in Turkmenistan's Cotton Fields," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 18, 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/cotton-child-labor-turkmenistan/25141281.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Marek Grzegorzczak, "Forced labour still prevalent in Turkmenistan cotton harvest," *Emerging Europe*, May 4, 2021, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/forced-labour-still-prevalent-in-turkmenistan-cotton-harvest/>.

¹⁸⁶ Timur Dadabaev, "Trajectories of Political Development and Public Choices in Turkmenistan," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 34 (2007): 135.

¹⁸⁷ Cotton Campaign, "Turkmenistan's Forced Labor Problem," <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/turkmenistans-forced-labor-problem.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Kathleen Collins, "Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61 (2009): 267.

sector of Turkmenistan. So far, the Turkmen government has not complied with international labour standards.¹⁸⁹

Conclusion

This last part of my research aimed at explaining the changes in forced labour after independence. We established the reasons why forced labour has continued to exist after the fall of the Soviet Union. The multiplicity of reasons, which broadly entail as results of the policies enacted by the Soviet Union, except for the cultural dimension, have ensured the initial continuity regarding the labour regimes of both countries. Additionally, a continued lack of mechanisation has made both countries continually reliant on manual cotton pickers. This period saw the introduction of legislature that still allowed mass mobilisation to be possible. This is principally perpetuated by the quota system and newly amended laws that made exceptions to state-ordered forced labour or coercion on the cotton harvest. The isolation of both republics, and heavy border security, have made leaving the countries and their labour regimes harder.

Additionally, via our hypothesis on leadership change, we aimed to explain the divergence in labour regimes between the countries. If former leaders were still influenced by Soviet thought after independence, new leaders were perhaps more inclined to liberalise the cotton sector. This shift is visible in Uzbekistan, whilst Turkmenistan's agricultural policies remain largely unchanged. Uzbekistan experienced, after the death of Karimov, the liberalisation of the cotton sector, the abolition of child labour, a repeal of its cotton quotas, and a sharp decline in forced labour. After a critical juncture, it is hard for Uzbekistan to shift back to an industry with forced labour due to two lock-in mechanisms: foreign pressure and the *Mustaqillik*. This change did not occur in Turkmenistan, where president Berdymukhammedov continued the policies set by his predecessor. Forcibly employing thousands in the cotton fields in which intense corruption and the Soviet legacy lock in this continuity.

¹⁸⁹ Kenneth Roth, "Turkmenistan Events of 2018," *Human Rights Watch*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan#>.

Conclusion

This research set out to examine which role the Soviet Union has played in the continued use of labour regimes in the cotton sectors of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. We have observed a break from the past which was initiated by the Soviet government to eradicate traditional forms of agriculture through the collectivisation process. In Uzbekistan, there was an influx of deportees from different parts of the Soviet Union. It constituted, in combination with peasants on collective farms, the first wave of forced labourers. Such an influx was not present in Turkmenistan since the Soviet authorities were more concerned with eradicating the Turkmen tribalistic culture. We employed Van der Linden's theory to determine whether collectivised farming is defined as forced labour via entrance, extraction, and exit whereby I concluded that collectivised farm work does constitute forced labour. Due to a lack of mechanisation, a large reliance on handpicked cotton has been observed. Only in the last fifteen years of communism, did we observe renewed attempts at mechanisation. We have discovered a large portion of pickers to be women and children, which replaced foreign deportees to be the second wave of forced labourers. Initially, after independence, the cotton harvest underwent little change. However, the mechanisation efforts of the last fifteen years of Soviet rule had been mitigated. Additionally, we have discussed the continuation of national policies by the Turkmen and Uzbek governments. This research hypothesised that leadership change contributed to a shifting policy. Only recently has a divergence been observed. Via Lange's interpretation of path dependency, we concluded that after a long period of continuation, leadership change brought sweeping reforms in Uzbekistan but not in Turkmenistan. The changes initiated by Mirziyoyev were kept in place via foreign pressure and Mustaqillik. These changes did not occur in Turkmenistan. Berdymukhammedov continues to follow his predecessor's policies, which is ensured by rampant corruption and the Soviet legacy.

Through this research, I conclude that the Soviet Union had a long-lasting impact on the current day labour coercion in both countries. The introduction of cotton quotas which have been reached via mass mobilisation of workers is still observed to this day. The delay in the mechanisation of the harvest has resulted in the slow adoption of modern harvest systems. It is only recently that we observe changes in the labour regime of Uzbekistan, whilst hardly anything has changed in Turkmenistan. As a result of the overall recent developments in Uzbekistan, it is fair to assume the prematurity of the findings in Chapter 3. The extent of policy reforms can only be further discussed and analysed when put into a broader perspective. Recommendations for further research are warranted. The region faces many challenges

ahead, for example, increased desertification because of Soviet water mismanagement. The future will demonstrate if Turkmenistan manages to take major steps to reduce forced labour as Uzbekistan did. Additionally, it remains to be seen if military conscripts will become the third wave of forced labourers in Uzbekistan.

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